



# WĀHINE MĀORI

## keeping safe in unsafe relationships

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28 November 2019





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**Citation:** Wilson, D., Mikahere-Hall, A., Sherwood, J., Cootes, K., & Jackson, D. (2019). *E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau: Wāhine Māori keeping safe in unsafe relationships*. Auckland, NZ: Taupua Waiora Māori Research Centre.

Published in November 2019 by Taupua Waiora Māori Research Centre, AUT Public Health and Mental Health Research Institute, Auckland University of Technology

**Place of publication:** Auckland, New Zealand

**Printed & Designed by:** PinkLime, Auckland University of Technology

**Image by:** Jon Radoff

ISBN: 978-1-927184-62-2 (Print)

ISBN 978-1-927184-61-5 (PDF)

This report is available on Taupua Waiora Māori Research Centre's website: <https://niphmhr.aut.ac.nz/research-centres/taupua-waiora-centre-for-maori-health-research/publications>

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# HE MIHI

E mihi atu ki ngā Ranginui ki runga, te Hau e pāngia ngā kiri o te tangata. Ko Ranginui, kia timata i te ao, e naki haere i te ahiahi i te pō.

E mihi atu ki a Papatūānuku, ki raro te Ūkaipō. Te Ūkaipō o tatou katoa. Haere rā, whakangaro atu i a koe ki te kōpū o te whenua, ki ngā rua kōiwi o ngā mātua, tīpuna ē, haere rā, haere atu rā!

E ngā hau e whā, e ngā mana, e ngā reo e ngā tapu te oranga o ia tangata tēnei te mihi mahana ki a tātou katoa.





## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Supported by the  
Marsden Fund Council from  
Government funding,  
managed by Royal Society  
Te Apārangi

MARSDEN FUND

TE PŪTEA RANGAHAU  
A MARSDEN





We sincerely thank the wāhine, rangatahi wāhine, tāne, kaumātua, kuia and key informants (who are experts Māori whānau affected by family violence) who participated in E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau. We are humbled by your generosity, honesty, and willingness to share your pūrākau (stories) and contributing to improving our understanding of violence occurring in our whānau, with the aim to eliminate this type of violence for your mokopuna and their mokopuna. Without your pūrākau and whakaaro, this research could not have occurred. We are greatly indebted to you all, and we will always treasure the knowledge, wisdom, expertise and guidance shared so generously. It is our hope that your whakaaro and our research skills will weave together a different way of looking at wāhine Māori to make a difference for your mokopuna now and into the future. Already your pūrākau and whakaaro have helped to re-shape the ways in which people working within this field and those living in Aotearoa think about family violence as it affects our whānau.

*E mihi ana mātou ki ngā kaiuru katoa mō o rātau  
kōrero nui.*

*Kō a koutou kōrero he taonga pono e pai ake ai tō  
marama.*

We thank Dr Shoba Nayar for her wonderful transcribing, making our mahi easier and Monique Robben for designing our logo.

We also thank all the people who we have had discussions with, and who have provided support and encouragement particularly Ngaropi Cameron and Awhina Cameron and the staff of Tu Tama Wāhine o Taranaki, and Ruahine Albert, Rolinda Karapu and Ariana Simpson at Waikato Women's Refuge – Te Whakaruruhau.

We also thank the following 'kaumātua and kuia' who have helped shape our thinking (their contributions will be presented in a later publication: Professor Tom Roa, Rangi Davis, Tess Moeke-Maxwell, Moe Milne, Hinewirangi Kohu Morgan, Maryann Pohatu, Lou Takiari, Bo Rota, and those who wished to remain unnamed. Kia nui ngā mihi ki a koe mō o tahua hiranga – he taonga ēnei.

Dr Michael Roguski, Kaitiaki Research and Evaluation, peer-reviewed this report.



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## GLOSSARY

<b>A</b>	<b><i>Āhuatanga</i></b> <b><i>Ātua</i></b>	quality or status of the situation ancestor with influence, god, diety
<b>H</b>	<b><i>Hāpori</i></b> <b><i>Hapū</i></b> <b><i>Hara</i></b> <b><i>Hurihuri</i></b>	community constellations of whānau violation of tapu, transgression turn over and over
<b>K</b>	<b><i>Kaitiaki</i></b> <b><i>Karakia</i></b> <b><i>Kete</i></b> <b><i>Kei te pai</i></b> <b><i>Koha</i></b> <b><i>Kōrero</i></b>	guardian ritual chants, prayers basket good, fine gift valuing contributions talk, discuss
<b>M</b>	<b><i>Mahi</i></b> <b><i>Māmā</i></b> <b><i>Mana</i></b> <b><i>Manaakitanga</i></b> <b><i>Mana motuhake</i></b> <b><i>Mātauranga</i></b> <b><i>Mana wahine</i></b> <b><i>Moko</i></b> <b><i>Mokopuna</i></b> <b><i>Mōteatea</i></b> <b><i>Muru</i></b>	work, perform mothers status, authority, prestige kindness, generosity, caring for others self-determination, autonomy Māori knowledge and wisdom status, authority, prestige of each Māori woman traditional tattoo, also refers to grandchild grandchild lament, traditional chant process to redress a transgression and restore balance
<b>N</b>	<b><i>Ngākau</i></b>	place of the heart, mind and soul
<b>O</b>	<b><i>Oritetanga</i></b>	equity
<b>P</b>	<b><i>Pākehā</i></b> <b><i>Pepeha</i></b> <b><i>Pepi</i></b> <b><i>Pono</i></b> <b><i>Pūrākau</i></b>	New Zealand European tribal saying used to identify who you are and where you are from baby to be true, honest, genuine stories, ancient stories



T	<i>Taiaha</i>	wooden weapon
	<i>Tamaiti</i>	Māori children
	<i>Tamariki</i>	Māori children
	<i>Tane</i>	man
	<i>Tāne</i>	men
	<i>Tāniko</i>	finger weaving on cloaks (korowai, kakahu)
	<i>Tapu</i>	sacred, restricted, prohibited
	<i>Tawhito</i>	old, ancient
	<i>Te Ao Marama</i>	the world of light and enlightenment
	<i>Te Ao Māori</i>	Māori world
	<i>Taonga</i>	treasure
	<i>Te Kore</i>	realm of energy and potential
	<i>Te Po</i>	realm of darkness
	<i>Te Tiriti o Waitangi</i>	Māori language version of the Treaty of Waitangi
	<i>Te whare tangata</i>	a woman's womb described as a house of humankind
	<i>Tika</i>	to be true, correct, right
	<i>Tikanga</i>	correct procedure, customary processes and practises
	<i>Tino rangatiratanga</i>	self-determination, autonomy
	<i>Tuakana</i>	elder
U	<i>Tupuna</i>	ancestor
	<i>Tūpuna</i>	ancestors
W	<i>Utu</i>	repay, respond
	<i>Waha</i>	mouth
	<i>Wahine</i>	woman
	<i>Wāhine</i>	women
	<i>Wahine toa</i>	courageous and accomplished women
	<i>Waiata</i>	song
	<i>Wairua</i>	spirit, soul
	<i>Whakamā</i>	profound sense of shame and embarrassment; inability to manaaki
	<i>Whakaaro</i>	thoughts, thinking
	<i>Whakapapa</i>	genealogy
	<i>Whakataukī</i>	proverb
	<i>Whakawhanaungatanga</i>	establishing connections
	<i>Whanau</i>	extended Māori family network
	<i>Whānau</i>	extended network of Māori families



# TE TIMATANGA: KARAKIA

Tukutuku te rangaranga Whetū Ao  
No te hautapu o ngā Rehua  
Whakahekea hei tātai ki te uma e...  
Whakakōpani ake ki te hiringa matau  
Hei mauri whakaoho ā hine  
He whare āhuru e uiuitia ana ki te hora  
He takapau wharanui ki te taumata iho wahine  
Heke, heke iho ki tāku kauhau ariki  
Hei umu katamu mōku nei e...

Weave the constellation of the stars  
Into your sacred being  
Bring them in to your heart  
Enabling ancient feminine energy  
A sanctuary in a space of seeking  
A sacred mat of your feminine blueprint  
Chanelled from your ancestry  
A feast prepared for your prosperity

*Nā, Rhonda Tibble, Ngāti Porou*







# Introduction

**Ko te tapu o te whare  
tangata,**

**Me te ahua atua o ngā  
tama-ariki**

The sanctity of the house of  
humankind (wāhine)

and the tamariki who are the  
images of the gods

Family violence is an area where people are oftentimes quick to judge, often blaming its victims, especially if they are wāhine Māori (Māori women). Such perceptions do little to constructively help wāhine and tamariki (Māori children) who need it most. Instead such responses further isolate them from the supports they need the most at times when they have exhausted their strategies for keeping themselves and their tamariki safe. Furthermore, negative and unhelpful perceptions reinforce to wāhine that the very system designed to help those who are living with violence in their whānau (extended family network) is not there to help them because they are Māori. Wāhine compared to other groups of women living in Aotearoa are more likely to bear the harmful consequences of violence, including being the victims of homicide (Ministry of Health, 2015; NZ Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2017).

When attention focuses mostly on the perceived needs and deficits of wāhine Māori, the concentration is then focused on what is wrong, and what needs fixing, with them as individuals. In the process, the strengths and assets wāhine Māori possess goes unrecognised and are disregarded. Such approaches invariably lead to the vilification of these wāhine, overlooking the necessary support and assistance they require for not only themselves but also their tamariki, when they need it the most. Such views and attitudes enable and sustain systems and services that discriminate and entrap them, and the people within them that interact with them in judgemental and racist ways

Despite Māori being disproportionately affected by family violence the problem persists, detrimentally affecting our whānau. Family violence affecting our whānau can be considered a wicked problem that defies resolution because, as (Hopson & Cram, 2018) point out, they occur within complex ecologies and contribute to vulnerability and marginalisation. Monbiot (2019) maintains that: “To get out of the mess we’re in, we need a new story that explains the present and guides the future...”. Monbiot claims we need new “restoration stories” to navigate and make sense of issues requiring transformation. Facts and figures alone do not evoke the necessary transformation required for complex social issues, and the prevailing “restoration stories” do little to change all sectors of the population.



Nothing is more accurate than in the area of family violence as it affects Māori and other Indigenous peoples around the world who have been colonised because the ‘facts and figures’ for Indigenous people has led to no real transformation. Instead, neo-liberalist generated ‘stories’ have created what Monbiot claims are “zombie doctrines” – stories that have become doctrines that influence how we function. Such doctrines are derived from deregulation, reductions in public protections, individualism and competitiveness. Yet they are flawed and clearly do not work particularly well for Indigenous cultures with holistic, collective and relational worldviews. In fact, they further marginalise and oppress Indigenous cultures like Māori, especially those affected by violence in their families.

Indigenous people’s restoration stories are in part ancient and timeless, embedded in cultural knowledge – for Māori, mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge and wisdom). Without a new restoration story, we are stuck with the old story that frames Māori in deficit and negative ways and that repeats the same outcomes and does little to promote change for our whānau. Continuing with more of the same impacts the hope and potential that exists within our whānau and deprives us of our opportunities to create a better future.

We began this report with the above whakatauki (proverb), gifted by Matua Tau Huirama for the Ministry of Health’s Family Violence Intervention Guidelines in 2002 (Ministry of Health, 2002). It speaks to the sanctity of wāhine and tamariki – the bearers of Māori future generations, and the future, respectively. This whakatauki highlights the essential role wāhine and tamariki in the healthy whakapapa of whānau and hapū, and their right to a violence-free home.

Therefore, in this report we use the terms wāhine, tāne and tamariki when referring to Māori women, men and children, respectively, in recognition of the mana and unique status they hold as the Indigenous people of Aotearoa. Furthermore, references to whānau relate directly to the extended family networks that function collectively for Māori, distinct from the common understandings of family (Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit, 2015).

*E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau* is research undertaken with wāhine Māori, kuia and kaumātua, key informants, rangatahi Māori (young wāhine Māori) and tāne Māori (Māori men). Our aim was to understand better the realities of wāhine Māori living with partner violence, from their perspective. More specifically we wanted to know how they kept safe and protect their tamariki when living in unsafe relationships and environments, with often limited resources and help.

As Māori and Indigenous researchers, we understand the precarious circumstances wāhine Māori face when living with violence in their homes and the communities they live in. All the wāhine Māori we encountered who are māmā (mothers) love their tamariki and want the best for them. Yet, for the most part this goes unappreciated. We also recognise the courage and strength wāhine Māori use to overcome the real fear of their tamariki being taken into state care for child protection concerns when they need compassionate and empathetic help. It is necessary to understand their struggle to obtain the necessary support and help they require at the times when they most need it. Primarily because they encounter a lack of useful assistance offered, oftentimes influenced by negative and unhelpful narratives that exist about wāhine Māori.

It is our hope that this report contributes to the decolonisation of violence occurring within our whānau, positioning our indigeneity and showing the importance of culture as a cure. This report provides an overview of the main research findings and forms the basis for other conceptual papers that will be published elsewhere. To begin, we will provide background information prior to explaining how we undertook the research. This will then be followed by the findings and our whakaaro (thoughts) and reflections on the pūrākau (stories) shared by our participants.

# He Whakamahi – Background

Hutia te rito o te harakeke,  
Kei whea te kōmako e kō?  
Kī mai ki ahau;

He aha te mea nui o te Ao?  
Māku e kī atu,  
he tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata

If the heart of the harakeke was removed,  
where will the bellbird sing?

If I was asked, “What was the most important  
thing in the world?” I would be compelled to  
reply, it is people, it is people, it is people.

Research on domestic violence, dominated by explanations originating from a Western worldview, generally focuses on individuals, is gendered and based on male hegemonic views of power and control that differ from a Māori worldview (Cram, 2001; Mikaere, 2011). Moreover, such explanations overlook the effects of ongoing colonisation and historical trauma impacting whānau in similar ways to other Indigenous peoples globally with comparable histories (Pihama, Cameron, & Te Nana, 2019). Current knowledge does little to convey wāhine Māori’s responses to, and resistances against their partners’ violent episodes.

Wāhine in unsafe relationships are far from passive recipients of abuse and violence (NZ Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2014). They respond to ensure their safety and that of their tamariki by engaging in acts of resistance to create ‘islands of safety’ (Richardson & Wade, 2010). To avoid wāhine Māori being ‘victims’ of partner violence, Aotearoa needs new narratives and ways of thinking about wāhine Māori and how they protect their tamariki.

In this chapter we provide an overview of the context at the time of writing this report, reinforcing the need for the evidence arising from *E Tū Wāhine*, *E Tū Whānau* to inform working with whānau. We then provide an overview of the enormity of the burden family violence in Aotearoa, followed by the origins of *E Tū Wāhine*, *E Tū Whānau*. We then explain the theory of change, Hurihuri o Whakaaro me te Mahi: Transforming Thinking and Doing.

## THE CONTEXT

At the time of writing this report, much is happening within the socio-political landscape of Aotearoa that signals the needs of Māori are not being met, evident by the existence of wide-spread social and health inequities. Māori are indicating clearly that enough is enough and the inequities they continue to face constitutes breaches of their human and Indigenous rights and those affirmed in the articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. For instance, areas of activity include:

1. **Not One More Child** – Māori concerns about the marked over-representation of Māori tamariki being removed from the care of whānau on the basis of child maltreatment and placed into State care.



2. **Hāpaitia te Oranga Tangata – Safe and Effective Justice** – the government’s review of the criminal justice system, where Māori are over-represented and wāhine Māori are the fastest growing prison population.
3. **Wai 2575 Health Services and Outcomes Kaupapa Inquiry**, which is enquiring into the health services and outcomes Māori receive that includes a Mana Wāhine claim.
4. **Ihumatao** – the struggle for the protection and conservation of the site of first settlement in Tamaki Makaurau (Auckland).
5. **Family Violence Sexual Violence Joint Venture** – cross-government collaborative approach addressing family violence and sexual violence in Aotearoa, which has included the establishment of Te Rōpū Māori as the advisory group to work in partnership with government and monitor and improve outcomes for Māori whānau.

## FAMILY VIOLENCE IN AOTEAROA

Violence within families and whānau is a global problem, particularly for Indigenous wāhine (Berry, Harrison, & Ryan, 2009; García-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2005). Compared to other women living in Aotearoa, wāhine Māori bear the greatest burden of family violence as victims of assault and homicide. While partner violence is estimated to affect one in three women in Aotearoa during their lifetimes (Fanslow & Robinson, 2011), prevalence rates of 57% and 80% have been found for lifetime violence for wāhine Māori (Koziol-McLain et al., 2004; Koziol-McLain, Rameka, Giddings, Fyfe, & Gardiner, 2007). Wāhine Māori are three times and tamariki are four times more likely to be victims of family violence-related homicide (NZ Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2017). This is cause for national shame especially given the disparities between Māori and other populations groups living in Aotearoa.

In two studies, of the wāhine screening positive for partner violence, 60% and 96% respectively had tamariki at home (Koziol-McLain et al., 2004; Koziol-McLain et al., 2007). A recent cohort study by Rouland, Vaithianathan, Wilson, and Putnam-Hornstein (2019) on child protection notifications, substantiations and out-home placements followed 56,904 children born in

Aotearoa during 1998 until they turned 18 years of age in 2015. Tamariki (n=13,145; 23%) were 2.5 times more likely to be notified to child protection services (Child, Youth and Family at the time) and 3.5 times more likely than New Zealand European tamariki to be placed in out of home care. Moreover, while poverty is commonly believed to be a significant risk factor, this study found even those tamariki living in the least deprived neighbourhoods were more likely to be notified for child protection concerns and placed in out of home care (Rouland et al., 2019). This notable disparity confirms the systemic bias when it comes to the care and protection of tamariki in Aotearoa.

Wāhine Māori are a younger population (26.1 years) compared to other population groups that have a median age of 37.4 years (Statistics New Zealand, 2019a, 2019b). Wāhine Māori are also more likely to have tamariki earlier than Pākehā (New Zealand European) women (Rarere, 2018). The presence of violence in wāhine Māori’s lives, especially during their pregnancy and following the birth of their babies has intergenerational impacts. Violence disrupts the nurturing environment of the womb, negatively impacts their mana wāhine (prestige and authority of Māori women) status and has long-term impacts on the relationships and bonding these wāhine have with their tamariki (Mikahere-Hall, 2017). Within the context of historical trauma, Pihama et al. (2019) state: “... trauma responses that influence whānau, affected past generations, and will have impacts on future generations unless they are addressed” (p. 14).

Aside from the personal and whānau ‘costs’ and associated long-term pain and suffering, violence within whānau is an enormous social and fiscal burden for Aotearoa (Wilson & Webber, 2014a, 2014b). Wāhine Māori traverse ‘minefields’ daily, and within the context of violence occurring within their whānau the decisions they make to be violence-free without the necessary resources could lead them and their tamariki to living with precarity. Wāhine Māori living with violence having to access services often leave them feeling dehumanised, demoralised, and subjected to punitive approaches – as Dhunna, Lawton, and Cram (2018) say, violence is an “affront” to their mana.

## ORIGINS OF E TŪ WĀHINE E TŪ WHĀNAU

Contemporary understandings about family violence and Indigenous wāhine (including wāhine Māori) living with violence occurring in their whānau are generally framed within dominant feminist perspectives. Moreover, explanations relating to their situations are often based on negative stereotypes, discrimination, and deficit explanations. For instance, wāhine living with violence are quickly blamed for being poor mothers, not protecting their tamariki, and oftentimes viewed as being just as violent as their partners (Fergusson, Horwood, & Ridder, 2005; Simmonds, 2011).

Such constructions of wāhine act as deterrents to seeking and receiving help and contribute little to recognising the strategies they use to survive and keep safe (NZ Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2016). These constructions also make invisible the valued role wāhine Māori have for maintaining whakapapa (genealogy) by being the bearers and nurturers of the future generations (Mikaere, 1994; Pihama, 2001). Prevailing dominant feminist knowledge about domestic and family violence fails to consider the impacts of colonisation, marginalisation, cultural dispossession, and socio-political disenfranchisement on many Indigenous wāhine (Pihama, Jenkins, & Middleton, 2003). Significantly, current negative constructions deny cultural contexts such as the complementary gender roles and power balance wāhine had with tāne in Māori society pre-colonisation that differs from dominant cultural constructions that are often gendered. Gender and power imbalances within Māori society came about through colonisation and assimilation, breaking down the natural protection in the cultural systems and processes of Māori.

This research arose out of genuine concerns about the negative interactions that wāhine Māori encounter when they need to engage with 'helping' agencies and services that leave them feeling degraded, disempowered, and discouraged (Rua et al., 2019). The punitive nature in which wāhine Māori are treated denies them of their rightful access to the help that they require in times of need, and instead vilifies them (Tolmie, Smith, Short, Wilson, & Sach, 2018) – diminishing both their autonomy and agency. Past research and personal interactions with young and older wāhine indicate similar experiences. These concerns, affirmed in family violence death reviews, prompted the need to expose the ways in which wāhine Māori keep themselves and

their tamariki safe in times where they are surrounded by adversity within and outside of their relationships.

Essentially, these negative constructions of wāhine Māori trigger chain reactions directing how others perceive and interact with them (Wilson, Smith, Tolmie, & de Haan, 2015). Current dominant narratives, particularly regarding the failure to protect their tamariki (NZ Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2016) do little to assist wāhine with being safe and being able to provide the necessary supports and resources. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for wāhine to say that they don't want their relationship to end. They just want the violence to cease (Wilson, Mikahere-Hall, Jackson, Cootes, & Sherwood, 2019). Consequently, wāhine are constantly having to navigate decision-making when their options are few – as one participant, Hana, eloquently stated:

***They just don't get it! They just don't get that if I leave, I have no money, no job, no home, no food for my kids. But... if I stay, they [tamariki] have a roof over their heads, they will have food on the table, and they will be safe.***

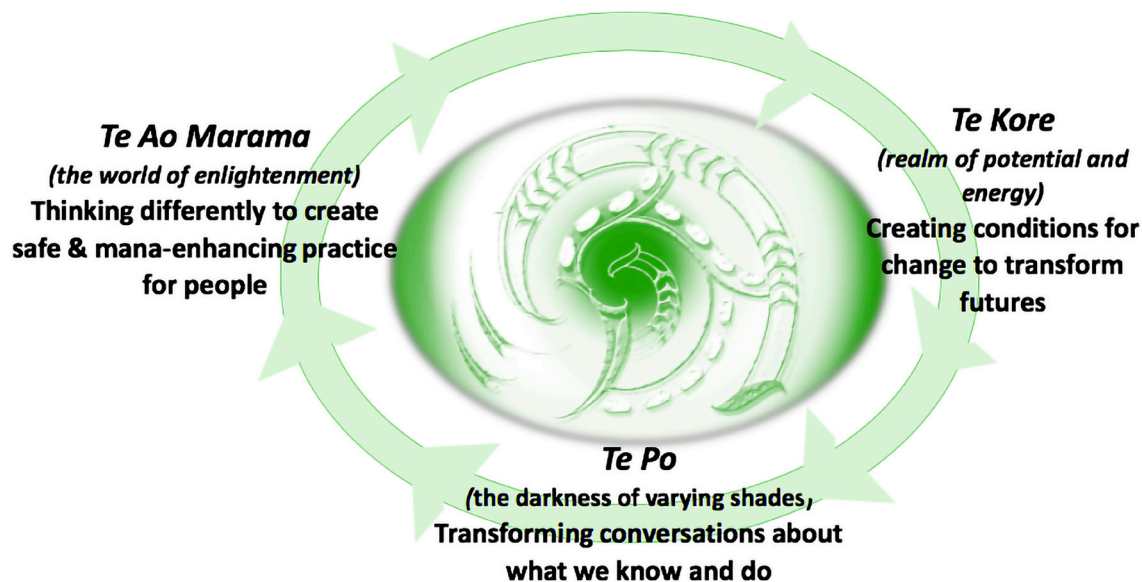
The whakapapa of this research directed the commitment to talk with Māori, particularly wāhine Māori about how they keep safe in unsafe relationships. *E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau* is about constructing new narratives that better align with the realities of wāhine. Such an approach needed to be supported by a theory of change that not just aimed to change the conversations about wāhine Māori, but also set up changes in the responses and ways wāhine and their tamariki are helped to be optimally safe.

## HURIHURI O WHAKAARO ME TE MAHI: TRANSFORMING THINKING AND DOING

*Hurihuri o Whakaaro me te Mahi: Transforming Thinking and Doing* is the theory of change developed to underpin *E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau*. This theory of change ultimately aims to change current conversations and what 'we' know about wāhine Māori, violence occurring within whānau, and the degree of autonomy and agency wāhine possess for exiting their relationship, to protect themselves and their tamariki. The framework of *Te Kore, Te Po, and Te Ao Marama* is used to explain the phases of *Hurihuri o Whakaaro me te Mahi* to bring about the transformation in how people think about, and the ways people work with, wāhine Māori.



Figure 2.1. Hurihuri o Whakaaro me te Mahi: Transforming thinking and doing



*Te Kore*, the realm of energy and potential, provides the space for creating the conditions for change. Using the energy and potential that *Te Kore* offers enables us to determine new futures and create environments necessary to enable change. Within the context of *E Tū Wāhine*, *E Tū Whānau*, this involves determining how the futures of wāhine faced with violence in their lives can be reconceptualised. Current predominate narratives and discourses within Aotearoa are at best unhelpful and at worst harmful. For wāhine to be supported better to live violence-free, new ways are needed that include the wellbeing of tāne and tamariki. Furthermore, the environments, such as government and non-government agencies, need to be critically reconfigured so the services they offer are more responsive and meet the needs of wāhine.

*Te Po* refers to the realm of enduring darkness. The pathway through the perpetual (or long-lasting) darkness symbolises the varying progressive stages of transformation. It recognises the importance of continual and sustained time as a key factor for improvement. Within the context of *E Tū Wāhine*, *E Tū Whānau*, it is the space to challenge and have conversations about what we know so the current 'restorative' narratives are changed to better reflect the realities of wāhine Māori. *Te Po* represents the transformation process for change where new vocabulary and narratives are identified to assist in

strengthening, widening and changing conversations from those that currently exist. It is also a time to revisit relationships with wāhine and the basis on which these are established and maintained. New knowledge that reflects better the realities of wāhine Māori forms the basis of new narratives and conversations, essential foundations for facilitating different outcomes for wāhine Māori.

Simply changing narratives and conversations is insufficient if different outcomes are to be achieved for wāhine Māori. *Te Ao Marama* is the world of light. The pathway toward the world of light requires drawing upon the realities of each wāhine and the barriers they encounter. Leadership is necessary for changing current unhelpful and obstructive pathways and practices. This changed thinking requires wāhine being able to restore and enhance their mana (status, authority, prestige) and reclaim their cultural identities along with the protective tikanga central to their oranga (wellbeing), inclusive of their tamariki, mokopuna and whānau. It requires safe and mana-enhancing places, spaces and people. It also requires people who dare to be innovative and creative – to do things differently and who are not afraid to let te ao Māori (Māori world) prevail.

## PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This research builds on previous research undertaken by Wilson, Jackson, and Herd (2015) which explored wāhine Māori's understanding of safety, and how they kept themselves and other wāhine safe. The primary objective of *E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau* was to explain the processes and strategies Indigenous wāhine use to keep safe within 'unsafe' partner relationships. When embarking on this research, we were aware that the outcomes may contradict existing theories and understandings in this area.

While the intention of *E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau* was to focus on the strengths and resources wāhine Māori possess, we did so with knowledge of the context within which violence within whānau occurs and that invariably the pūrākau would locate wāhine within their everyday realities and circumstances. To the outsiders looking in, some pūrākau of wāhine may appear to reinforce the negative perceptions and stereotypes they may hold – we urge readers to move beyond such stances and identify the strengths and resources they use to keep themselves safe, enabling them to protect their tamariki and mokopuna within adverse situations. It is through understanding the complexities of their lives and the challenges wāhine encounter when navigating and negotiating systems and services, designed to support and keep them safe, that we hope to disrupt the status quo and evoke changes. The unhelpful and often negative narratives and conversations that currently exist do little to keep wāhine and tamariki safe.

## REPORT OUTLINE

This chapter provides the background information to *E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau*. In Chapter 3, we will provide a brief overview of the research as it applies to this report.

In Chapter 4, we present the first key theme arising from the findings of the interviews with wāhine Māori: first, *Becoming entrapped – understanding the context*. This chapter focuses on providing the context within which wāhine become entrapped in their relationships, by not only their partners, but the system, providing the background to wāhine Māori keeping safe in unsafe relationships.

In Chapter 5, the other key theme, *Keeping Safe* is presented. *Keeping Safe* explains how wāhine keep safe and protect their tamariki amidst the diverse adversities they live within.

Chapter 6 presents the findings of interviews with tāne Māori. In this chapter, three key themes are presented: *Growing Up with Violence, Hurting Her Wairua*, and *Breaking the Mindset*. These interviews provide an overview of the reflections of tāne, no longer using violence, about their role in their relationships and their use of violence.

Chapters 7 pulls together the key messages that arise out of this research that challenge current conversations in order to transform the ways in which wāhine Māori and tamariki are treated and interacted with.



## RESEARCH OVERVIEW

**Mā te rongo, ka mōhio**  
**Mā te mōhio, ka mārama**  
**Mā te mārama, ka mātau**  
**Mā te mātau, ka ora**

Once you have been shown, you will know

Once you know, you will understand

Once you understand, you will have  
information

Once you have information, you will be  
knowledgeable for life and wellbeing.

A Kaupapa Māori research methodology was used that privileged a Māori worldview, decolonisation and intersectional theories to improve understanding the realities of wāhine living with violence. More specifically we used Mana Wāhine theory because it reclaims the status and authority wāhine once held and also allowed us to examine the influence systemic and social structures on their realities and keeping safe (Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011). We used pūrākau so participants could share their stories (Lee, 2009).

### PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Thirty-six participants were recruited using purposive sampling and whanaungatanga (using established relationships): 28 wāhine Māori over the age of 16 years and who had lived in an 'unsafe' (abusive or violent) relationship and currently living violence-free (we screened each participant for risk of harm prior to participating). During the analysis phase we also recruited eight tāne, seven who had used violence, and one facilitator of a kaupapa Māori men's group. Participants came from both the North and South Islands and belonged to affiliated to several Iwi although some were still connecting with their whakapapa. Further details about participants can be found in Chapters 4 and 6.

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

In-depth semi-structured interviews were undertaken lasting 60 to 180 minutes. These were undertaken in a way that enabled each participant to tell their story – this enabled them to have autonomy over their pūrākau. Following transcription of the interviews, all identifying features were removed (such as names, place names, geographical areas) and a pseudonym was assigned. Transcriptions were checked against the audio-recordings. Some wāhine began and ended their interviews with karakia (chant or prayer), then whakawhanaungatanga (establishing connections) was undertaken. Each participant received a koha (gift) as an appreciation for their contribution.

## DATA ANALYSIS

For the purposes of this report, a thematic analysis was undertaken of the wāhine and tāne interviews using a Mahi a Rōpū approach (Boulton, Gifford, Kauika, & Parata, 2011; Gifford, Wilson, & Boulton, 2014). This involved the research team firstly undertaking a preliminary constant comparative analysis across the interviews, and then undertaking an analysis by the whole team (Wilson et al., 2019). From this analysis we sorted the codes into themes and sub-themes, constructing diagrams and memos as we combined the data. Data saturation (that is, no more new information was arising from the pūrākau) provided an indication that themes and sub-themes could be finalised. We then checked these against the transcripts to ensure they included key contextual elements of the pūrākau. Participant quotes (edited to remove redundant wording and to ensure they were easy to read) were then used to illustrate the themes and provide contextual elements to assist in their explanation.

## LIMITATIONS

Diversity exists among wāhine and tāne Māori across each iwi and across the country, including the differences that exist in their cultural identity, beliefs and practices and their particular socio-historical contexts. This research provides contextual and cultural insights into wāhine Māori women's experiences of living in an unsafe relationship, and while there are similarities across their pūrākau there are also differences that exist due to their diverse histories and experiences. While we did not exclude wāhine in same-sex relationships, only those in heterosexual relationships participated. Therefore, this research does not explain the differences that may exist for those living in same-sex relationships

where a partner uses violence. Furthermore, the findings of this research have been presented to diverse forums and feedback has affirmed that these reflect the realities many wāhine and tāne experiences. However, while most of the literature within the family violence sphere overlooks the ongoing intergenerational effects of colonisation, historical trauma and social deprivation that affects Māori whānau, hapū and communities, this research provides an opportunity to understand better how wāhine live and cope within unsafe relationships. We recommend further research be undertaken, especially in light of some of the findings presented in this report.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval for the study was gained from Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTC 16/19 and 16/146) prior to the recruitment of participants. Access to the raw data is restricted to the research team only in line with the ethical approval and informed consent provided by participants.

All care has been taken to preserve the anonymity of participants. They all have told their (life-stories) with the hope of making a difference for their tamariki and their mokopuna. Therefore, we have removed all identifying features from their transcripts. Informed consent forms have been held separately from the data and transcripts held in password protected digital files. All data will be destroyed after six years.



# BECOMING ENTRAPPED: UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

The collective pūrākau of wāhine participating in *E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau* revealed diverse realities, contexts and experiences and apparent contradictions in their lives. They reported being simultaneously safe and unsafe, an oxymoron of living and navigating violence and while attempting to keep themselves and their tamariki safe. Wāhine traversed multiple, complex issues while living with violent partners. This was made difficult by the numerous layers and tensions they negotiated daily. At times, wāhine Māori recounted being between “a rock and a hard place” having few realistic and pragmatic options. They were motivated to protect their tamariki and keep them as safe as they could despite numerous barriers and challenges and little constructive assistance.

Wāhine described being forced to strategize and navigate their partners’ violent behaviours because to do otherwise would have increased their vulnerability for harm and that of their tamariki. Oftentimes, the help they should be able to rely upon was neither accessible nor available to them. These wāhine resembled the metaphor of poppies on a rubbish heap (Bray, 1992) – a beautiful red poppy thriving where nothing else survives, displaying strength amid adversity often on the margins of society, while coming to know in the long-term their situations were untenable. Despite the adversity evident in their lives, we found wāhine acted according to their individual contexts in order to survive, while aiming to make situations safe for them and their tamariki. Navigating this complex intersection required an intelligence to read their environment, strength despite the adversity in their lives, and taking action to keep themselves and their tamariki safe.

Pomare (1949) proclaimed,

***Everybody who has the welfare of the people at heart knows that the child of today is the men or wāhine of tomorrow and that the foundation of any strong virile race, fit to fight in the forefront of the battle of life, lies in the care that a mother gives her child after the birth (p.40).***

Despite Pomare clearly positioning the importance of wāhine Māori and highlighting the role they have in whakapapa, mothering and nurturing their babies and tamariki more than seven decades ago, we found wāhine participating in *E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau* struggled to get the support they needed. Their pūrākau demonstrated their absolute commitment to do the best they can within the contexts, resources and realities they have.

For the majority, theirs are stories of mothering amidst adversity with little or no support. While readers of this report may claim that wāhine are no different to other women living with violence in their lives and represent ‘typical’ experiences of partner violence, wāhine Māori have layers of complexities associated with being Māori in a country with ongoing colonisation – for most they live with the social marginalisation, generational social and economic disenfranchisement, ongoing effects of colonisation and encounter racism and discrimination daily.

The wāhine in this research faced additional challenges and barriers associated with being Māori. Wāhine lived with the ongoing effects of colonisation and colonialism, contemporary social and economic disenfranchisement, historical and intergenerational trauma, and isolation. However, several reasons were shared to contextualise why wāhine stay in relationships with partners who use violence, including the systemic entrapment the majority of wāhine faced when they need help the most. These wāhine were fully aware of these life challenges because they are reminded of, and have reinforced, their weaknesses, their deficits, and what they do wrong by those they encounter. It is something reinforced by media portrayal of wāhine Māori – providing a further deterrent to seeking help.

The contexts within which the violence they endured makes their lives and experiences different from other women. Unless there is recognition of the realities of wāhine nothing will change for these them. The wāhine

in this research gave their pūrākau generously with frank honesty, all with the hope that things will change for their tamariki (tamariki), mokopuna (grand-children/tamariki) and their mokopuna mokopuna (great grand-tamariki) as Hana described:

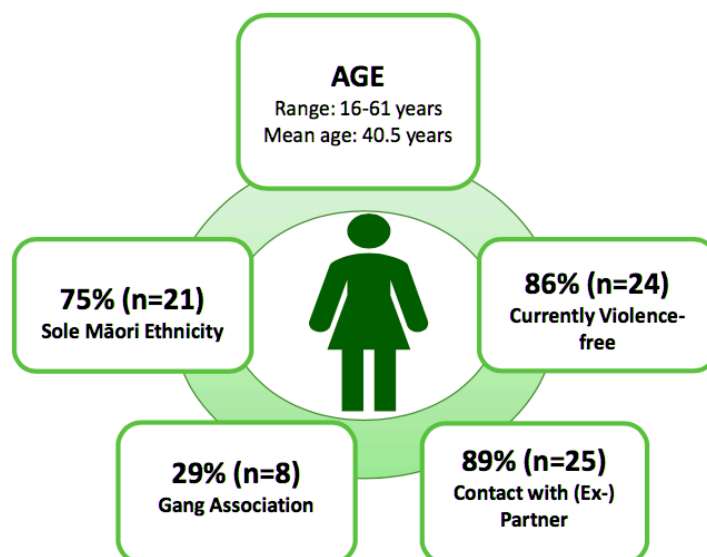
*I’m really adamant about my granddaughters never, you know, never being in this situation, and having the strength and the courage if they do get in the situation to walk away.*

Three key themes emerged from the data: *Becoming Entrapped, It Didn’t Start with Violence, and Keeping Safe*. These themes provide insights into how wāhine keep safe in what are considered unsafe relationships. First, we begin with a description of the wāhine participating in *E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau*. We ask you, as readers to be respectful of the wāhine and their messages embedded within the excerpts shared in this and the following chapters.

## WĀHINE MĀORI PARTICIPANTS

Twenty-eight wāhine aged between 16 and 61 years (median age 40.5 years) shared their pūrākau. Three-quarters (n=21) identified sole Māori ethnicity, while the remainder identified as mixed Māori and either New Zealand European (n=5) and/or Samoan (n=2). At the time of their interviews, 24 indicated they lived violence-free and 25 had contact with their (ex)partner. One in three wāhine indicated in their pūrākau that they had some form of gang association (Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1. Wāhine Māori – participant demographics**



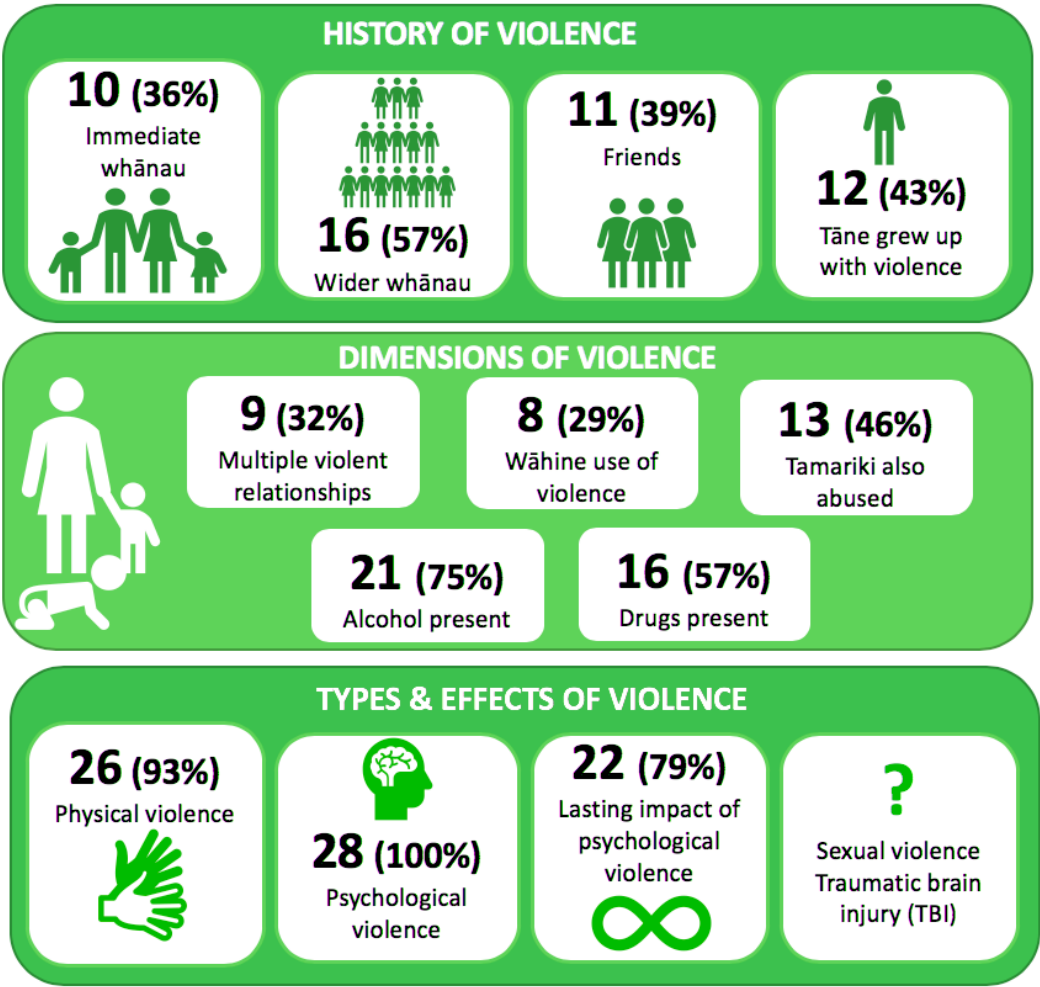


Not all the wāhine grew up with violence in their whānau home. Just over one-third (n=10) indicated that they experienced violence in their immediate whānau, although more than half (n= 16) talked about violence occurring in their wider whānau. Less than half (n=11) indicated there was violence also occurring in their friendship groups. Less than half less than half (n=12) of their tane grew up with violence.

Just under half (n=13) of wāhine indicated their tamariki were also abused and threatened within the context of their partners' violence. Approximately four out of five (n=21) wāhine revealed that alcohol featured in the violence their partner used, and more than half (n=16) talked most often about their partners' use of drugs (Figure 4.2). Oftentimes drugs and alcohol exacerbated the intensity and severity of the violence, particularly if 'P' or 'meth' (methamphetamine) were present.

Almost all (n=26) of the wāhine experienced physical violence, and all (n=28) talked about their partners' psychological violence, which for 22 had lasting impacts of the psychological violence inflicted on them. While we did not specifically ask about their experiences of sexual violence, many of the wāhine talked about this form of violence being used as a form of threat or control (Figure 4.2). We also noted some wāhine talked about extreme forms of violence they endured, for example repeated blunt force trauma by repetitive punching to their heads or bashing their heads into walls, and non-fatal strangulation. Consequently, we question the prevalence of traumatic brain injury (TBI) among wāhine, particularly the short- and long-term effects such assaults have on their cognitive functioning and the influence this may have on their decision-making and parenting. This is an area beyond the scope of this research that requires further investigation.

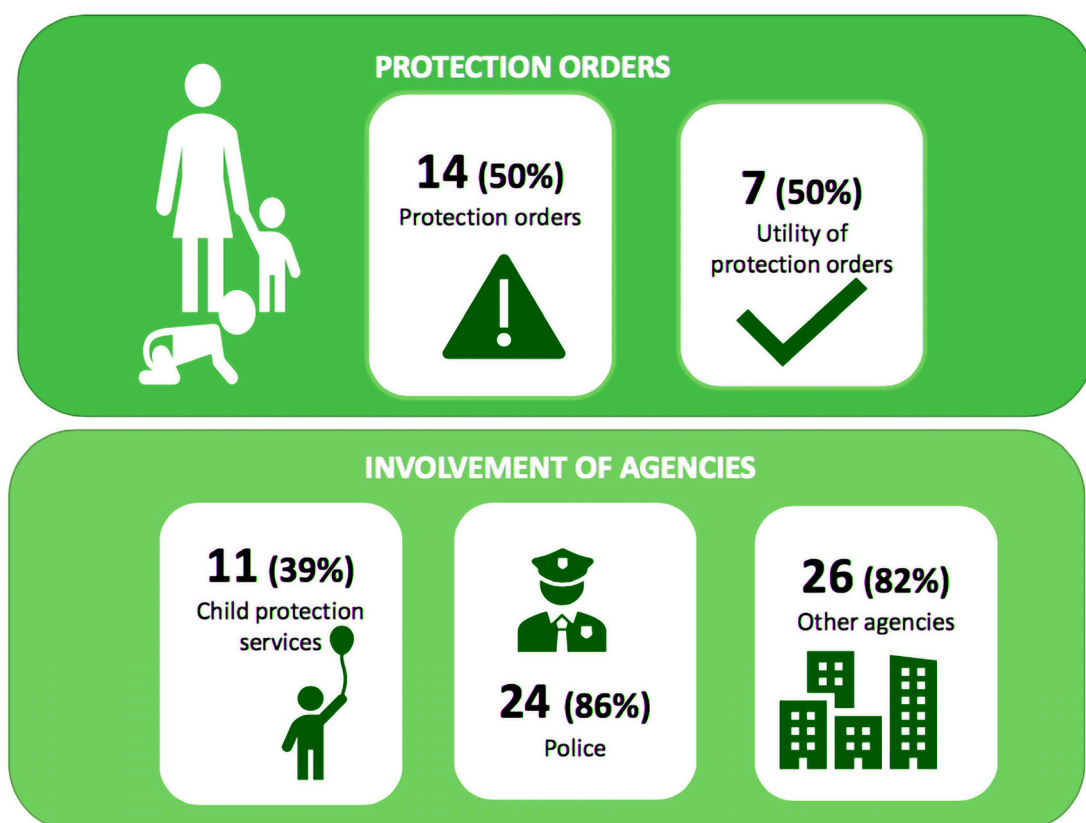
Figure 4.2. Experiences of violence evident in pūrākau of wāhine



These wāhine were not strangers to government and non-government agencies. Almost all (n=26) of wāhine were involved with agencies, most (n=24) had contact with the Police. Less than half (n=11) had child protection services (Child Youth & Family or Ministry of Tamariki – Oranga Tamariki) involved in their lives. Half (14) of the wāhine had protection orders, of these only half (n=7) found these useful. Nevertheless, most wāhine generally found agencies unhelpful, which reinforced that they could only rely on themselves to keep their tamariki safe – the responsibility was theirs alone (Figure 4.3). Eight of the 11 wāhine who had contact with child protection services had their tamariki taken into state care, of which five continue to fight to get them back into their care. Three of these wāhine spent time in State care as children or young people.

Just over one-third of wāhine reported having multiple violent relationships. Less than one-third of wāhine talked about their use of violence within the relationship, providing an opportunity to understand better this phenomenon (discussed later in this chapter). Half of wāhine indicated their tamariki were also abused within the context of responding to their partners' repeated violence in their relationships.

**Figure 4.3. Protection order utility and involvement of other agencies**





## BECOMING ENTRAPED

The lived realities of wāhine are crucial to understanding why it is difficult or near on impossible for many to leave their violent relationships, especially when they and their tamariki are at heightened risk of harm. It is important to note that we found all the wāhine Māori entered their relationships with partners that subsequently became violent, never thinking their life and wellbeing and that of their tamariki would ever be at risk. It was not something that they thought they would ever need to think about.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, most wāhine (n=25, 89%) remained in contact with their (ex-)partner at the time of their interviews because of their connection to their tamariki through whakapapa.

Nevertheless, their realities are complex, do not always make sense to outsiders, and are often full of contradictions. Their contexts are layered with multiple and compounding forms of oppression (Figure 4.4). For some wāhine, their relationship was the first time they had encountered violence while for others it was a normalised way of life. However, gradually over time these wāhine all became trapped at multiple levels, dependent upon their partner and their unique circumstances. Wāhine encountered the following 'unseen fences' while keeping themselves and their tamariki safe:

**Figure 4.4. Multiple forms of oppression**



<sup>1</sup>For a full explanation of Wāhine Māori entering relationships that become violent, see Wilson, D., Mikahere-Hall, A., Jackson, D., Cootes, K., & Sherwood, J. (2019). Aroha and manaakitanga—That's what it is about: Indigenous wāhine, "love," and interpersonal violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 0(0), 0886260519872298. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519872298>

- their own fears and capabilities at specific times;
- their partners' increasing psychological abuse and controlling behaviours;
- the people in services they need; and
- the accessibility and availability of services.

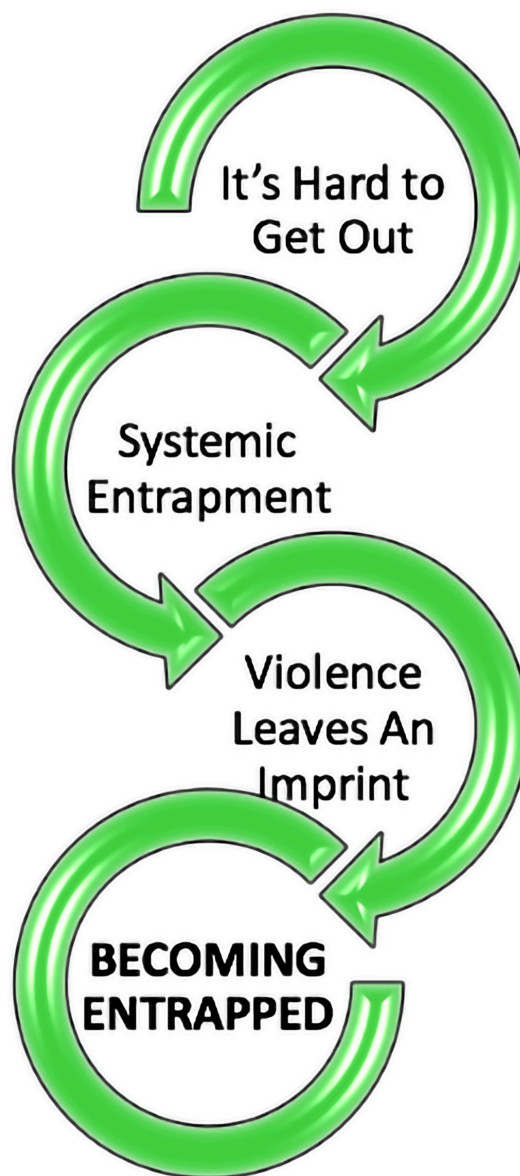
At a personal level, wāhine grappled with the effects of violence and trauma, fearing the safety of their tamariki and themselves in face of diminishing resources and strategies to manage a life for them and their tamariki on their own. They all reported their fears that their tamariki will be taken (for child protection related concerns) if they sought help – for some of the wāhine their fears were substantiated, having their tamariki removed from their care for life.

Wāhine are also forced to navigate, often daily, their partners' challenging and unpredictable behaviours (and sometimes predictable). These behaviours included threats, manipulation, surveillance and control, oftentimes increasing in frequency, intensity, and severity entrapping wāhine in their relationships. For the most part, leaving was not a one-time event – many wāhine returned several times before finally leaving often because they lacked the help and resources necessary, and given the threats against them and the lives of their tamariki, was the safest thing to do. Ahorangi talked about leaving but her partner finding her, this eventually led to her feeling trapped:

*When our relationship started deteriorating, I would mouth off and say things and then his reaction would be to shut me up and that would include physical violence. And then there would be times when there was sexual violence as well. I began to feel trapped because whenever I left, he would find me! And then it got to a point where I think I was numb and felt I couldn't get out. I was in survival mode.*

At a systems level, wāhine lacked confidence, trust, did not know what questions to ask or what they were entitled to, and feared that asking for help would lead to their tamariki being taken. They also talked about the high likelihood of encountering judgmental and unhelpful people in services designed to help those in need. The theme *Becoming Entrapped* has three sub-themes: *It's hard to get out*; *systemic entrapment*, and *violence leaves an imprint* (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5 *Becoming Entrapped* – sub-themes



Wāhine became entrapped in ways that extended beyond their partners' manipulation, threats, surveillance, and controlling behaviours. Becoming entrapped occurred at personal, partner and systemic levels. At a personal level, for most wāhine their partners' violence perpetuated periods of psychological paralysis or numbness, reinforcing their thoughts that they could not change their situation. *It's hard to get out*, including *personal costs*, sheds light on the complicated spaces wāhine occupy and navigate to keep safe and protect their tamariki. As Airini simply articulated:

***Leaving is easier said than done.***

## IT'S HARD TO GET OUT

*It's hard to get out* reflects the multiple burdens these wāhine had to bear with little or no support, oftentimes isolated from friends, families and any other help that should be available. Wāhine came to realise, over varying lengths of time, the pattern of abuse and violence they were living with was a reality that impacted their wairua. Nonetheless, most of the wāhine had a connection to their partner who had long periods of not engaging in violence, commonly downplaying the severity and risk associated with their partners' violence.

However, at some point, their partners' threats directed at themselves, the wāhine and/or their tamariki, an increasing sense of danger, and for some, their partner's jealousy became untenable. For Anahera, her partner's threats of suicide signalled her relationship was in trouble:

***[Him] talking about suicide to me, I guess, become real that this relationship is in trouble. Because, the threats also went to actions. I actually witnessed him step out in front of a train to make me scared. And it did scare the shitting daylight out of me. So, he stood out in front of a train and waited [un]til it got close before he left, and I was screaming my head off. So that's the kind of emotional abuse that I'd gone through. Not only that, suicide in terms of hanging himself you know show me the rope that "This is what I'm going to do if you leave me".***

The wāhine reacted to their situations in various ways – some experienced constant anxiety, feeling terrified and crying; others felt 'locked up', trapped and numb; others experienced a degree of paralysis; others self-medicated with alcohol or drugs to manage their stress. Some wāhine talked about leaving, only to return because of the threats to their tamariki and themselves and lacking the necessary support and resources to assist them deal with these situations (Figure 4.6).

While the wāhine talked about avoiding alcohol and drugs to monitor and ensure their tamariki safety, there came a point in their relationship where they used them alcohol and/or drugs to self-medicate to cope with their situations. Marama talked about the constant tension between her partner and herself, which eventually led to her self-medicating with 'P':

***Because the tension between us wasn't right. Because he was just bringing his ugly stuff from himself, from his other relationships, into ours. Which wasn't healthy, and I didn't like it. But the next day I just thought of smoking P.***

Arorangi also spoke about her use of alcohol and drugs to get through the violence and rape she endured at the hands of her partner:

***I became an alcoholic and a drug user, [although] not on heavy drugs you know, just dope. Because that was my way of dealing with shit, because I at that time I didn't want to accept help. But I knew I needed it.***

Eventually, with little options available, these wāhine assessed their situations and made the best decisions they could at the time for the safety of their tamariki and themselves. Mahuika, talked about using her experience of lacking the necessary skills and knowledge to help others, because while she had been educated by life, she was not educated for life:

***I'm not educated like you guys you know. I'm just like coming from where I've been and seen. Yeah, and I've seen some real shit you know. And I've been real blessed in all of that. You know I've had, wairua experiences.***



Piata talked about just surviving each day:

*I was just surviving, [I] wasn't living. I was barely existing, but I had to survive. ... I think you have to be careful when you strategize. Like I said any deviation from the normal he would smell it out: "What are you doing? Why are you doing this for?" And he'd come up with stories of even when we weren't doing anything, you know, "Why are you doing this for? You're getting the Police involved? Are you monitoring me?" You know just all this stuff, it's like god!*

But for all the wāhine, they associated leaving with the fear of repercussions and consequences. Half of those with protection orders (n=7) were either scared to use them or found them to be ineffective. Leaving was made difficult because the wāhine most often lacked support, could not access money and housing, and needed to manage leaving and resourcing this challenge on their own.

The pūrākau of wāhine raised questions about the efficacy of protection orders for those who had them. For the most part, wāhine feared and were wary of agencies reporting the Police doing little or nothing to help prevent the violence. The lack of efficacy of protection orders then raised the potential vulnerability of wāhine when they become a defining point for leaving a violent relationship. Despite years of using their primal intelligence to keep safe, wāhine were unheard and their strengths and strategies for keeping them and the tamariki safe unseen.

## PERSONAL COSTS

Wāhine reported numerous personal costs to them as a result of the violence they lived with (Figure 4.6). Many of the wāhine recounted extreme physical trauma, including head trauma and non-fatal strangulation. The ensuing physical effects of violence (such as a high likelihood of traumatic brain injury) made it problematic for wāhine to act proactively. Instead they managed their lives in the best way they could. Of note, most did not seek healthcare for their injuries, instead remaining hidden and isolated while the bruises and evidence of their beatings disappeared. For these wāhine, when the violence increased in severity and frequency a psychological paralysis also made it difficult to change their situation. What we found were descriptions of wāhine disassociating for periods of time and having

difficulty making connections between salient things occurring in their lives. For example coherently explaining to the Police what had happened to them and their tamariki. Oftentimes, these wāhine appeared to be living with acute and chronic trauma, injuries, and contradictions – without the necessary health care for these.

Being emotionally and cognitively disconnected for periods made it difficult when they wāhine interviewed by Police, going through court cases or simply asking for help. Further, common across participants' pūrākau was the depletion of their physical strength as their partners' violence increased in frequency and severity. Remaining in their relationships led most wāhine to function in survival mode amid the turmoil of their lives, while trying to minimise any further disruption in the lives of themselves and their tamariki. Ahorangi, reflecting on her experiences, understood clearly why wāhine chose to stay with a partner who used violence:

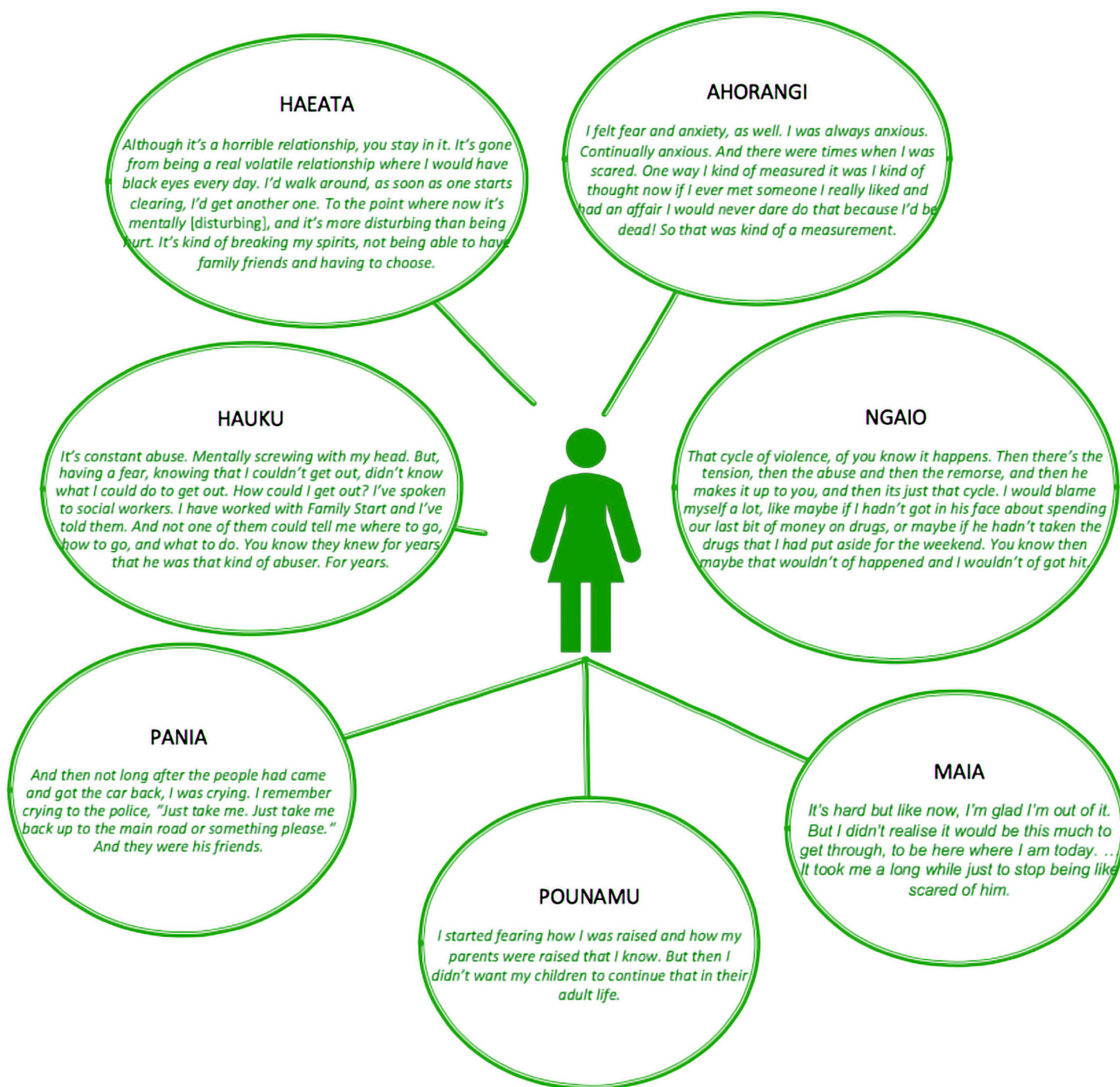
*I can understand you know when I meet wāhine that are in violent relationships how frightened they are, and how it's easier sometimes just to stay because it's too hard to get out.*

## FEAR THAT TAMARIKI WILL BE TAKEN

The desire to have a better life for their tamariki and themselves motivated some wāhine to leave their relationships. Ironically, the safety of their tamariki was paradoxically a reason to stay in their relationship but also a reason to leave. Nevertheless, the majority of wāhine had few options available to them. A critical dilemma arose for them when they were forced to let others into their lives and ask for assistance to keep them and their tamariki safe. When their strategies to protect and keep their tamariki safe became depleted they had little option but to seek help, but as Aihi indicated this was accompanied with the risk of losing their tamariki.

*... there is nothing to help the woman so what happens? ... the woman tries to protect the tamariki, staying in a relationship that she doesn't want to be in generally. Then some agency finds out and they want to protect the tamariki, so they remove the tamariki. But they do nothing to help the woman.*

Figure 4.6. Examples of personal costs on wāhine



The biggest fear wāhine had and that prevented them from seeking help was that their tamariki would be taken by the State, namely Child Youth and Family, or as it is more recently known, Oranga Tamariki. It is a fear grounded in the reality that they had already had tamariki taken into State care or they knew other wāhine in their whānau or among their friends whose tamariki had been taken. Therefore, asking for help involved significant risk and vulnerability. Arini talked about the tension of organisations that expect wāhine Māori to leave and why her fears of losing her tamariki and not being ready to leave her partner (for safety reasons) was based on reality:

*I've seen it too with like CYFS [Child Youth and Family] and [my] sister's gone through some stuff, and they want to take the kids you know off her or whatever and their solution is just to get rid of the partner. For some organisations the solution is to stay away from the partner, and for me from my experience it's just a dead end if you're not ready to stay away, because it's easier said than done.*

For wāhine whose babies and tamariki had already been taken because of child protection reasons entered yet another long-term struggle – getting their baby or child(ren) back. Most of the wāhine articulated a pervasive lack of trust in agencies and fear of their tamariki being taken. Mahuika talked about her fears that her tamariki would be taken, and having nowhere to go for help:

*Honestly, I had nowhere to turn. You know you won't go to authorities because wāhine fear losing their tamariki. You know and at the end of the day that's all you've got left, when your partner's a mess. That's all you've got left. You don't even think about yourself. It's those kids.*

Wāhine living with violence in their homes have complex and multidimensional lives and are repeatedly forced to navigate and manage multiple competing tensions. Understanding why wāhine remain, for most in exceptionally violent relationships, is difficult for those standing on the outside looking inwards. To this end, wāhine talked about their beliefs that their partners had potential and were essentially good people who possessed their own stories and needed healing like some of them – wāhine just needed to stay strong until this occurred. Moreover, for the majority of wāhine their relationships were not always 'bad' times. Bad and good times intermingled, with varying durations between them.

## IMPORTANCE OF WHAKAPAPA

A key consideration for wāhine was to prioritise whakapapa (the sanctity of whānau genealogy), which committed wāhine to tāne thereby establishing a lifelong connection to protect the biological interest of their tamariki and their ties to whānau. Notably, the commitment wāhine had to maintaining the whakapapa connections of their tamariki to their father and his whānau was significant and frequently guided their decision making.

The overriding value of their tamariki and the importance of maintaining their whakapapa links underpinned and informed wāhine Māori's decisions. This included the contact their tamariki had with their partner and his whānau, which could heighten the risk their tamariki would be removed by the State. The wāhine talked about the diversity in their partners' capacities as fathers – for most, their partners were part of the whakapapa of their tamariki, for others they perceived their partner to be a 'good dad', and for others their partners lacked the necessary skills and knowledge about how to be a positive father figure.

Maia talked about the importance of whakapapa for her tamariki – in her eyes it was the right of their tamariki to have their father in their lives. It was through the process of respecting this whakapapa link her tamariki had to their father and acknowledging the importance of whānau being involved in their lives that wāhine found themselves in strife:

*I can't speak for my dad but I'm just going to say I think that is where that support stopped was when I chose [ex-partner]. And, they've said that in the FGCs [family group conferences]. They've said I've chosen [ex-partner] over the kids. My father actually said that I neglect my kids, which isn't true. I neglect the kids! I think what he means by neglect is my father sees me as this little girl who runs after a guy and puts the needs of having this guy in her life first before the [kids]. I think what my father didn't realise was that what I was actually wanting to retain for my kids was their right to have a father.*

Despite the diversity in partners' capacities as fathers, the notion of whakapapa often drove the decisions wāhine made about their tamariki and the connection with their fathers (see *Protecting others*).



The taking of tamariki by child protection services had a devastating impact to the wairua and psychological wellbeing of wāhine – for some, their tamariki had been taken for life. Marama explained the consequences of making such a decision, which she thought was in the best interests of her pepi (baby). Taking her pepi into State care brought her and her partner back together, uniting them in a grief that worsened their relationship, the violence and their drug use:

*It's sad to say but they said I bent the rules. They said I broke the rules by leaving her with him. But to me, Maori, in my eyes he was the father. To them he was not an approved person. How can a father, how can they take a right from you? Of not letting your own child be with the dad. Someone must of narked me. Anyway, they found out I had left her, left my daughter with her father and his mother. The next day they [child protection services] took her. The next day and I'd done nothing wrong you know. I mothered her. I graduated [intensive supervised parenting programme]. I proved to them that I could keep her safe. So, to me leaving her with the father was that it was decision I made that I knew was safe because he's a good man. He was a good, he is a good man. But everything changed the day that she got taken. It got worse.*

Pania also talked about the impact of losing her tamariki to State care:

*When I lost my kids, when I couldn't go anywhere, I just become depressed. Okay I was crying every day. Just break down, missed my kids. And yeah, then I woke up and went, "Nah, can't do it."*

Education, social status and history of non-violent whānau are not protective factors regarding the risk of wāhine having their tamariki taken by child protection services. University education and growing up in a whānau without violence and imbued with cultural values did not protect Maia, whose first child was taken based on a fabricated and vexatious accusation of abuse made by Maia's partners' ex-partner. This was despite, over a 10-month period, well child nurses observing Maia as a kind, loving and nurturing mother who lived in a clean and tidy house and importantly was no longer living with her ex-partner. Maia shared the devastation she experienced when she received a court order regarding her unborn (second) child, when she was not living with her ex-partner.

*I'll never forget that [social worker] up at [suburb] and how she spoke of me, and in making you feel really put down. You know you really feel like a daughter without your mother there. You know your [non-violent] mother will just hit anybody who even dares belittle or bully you. In those FGCs [family group conferences] you're just open fodder, everyone and anyone can say anything, and they [those present at the FCG] did. And then it was [name removed] she said, "She chooses to still be in a relationship, therefore, is unfit." ... The lengths that they'll go to create the evidence to meet that section [of legislation]. And where they will really create evidence that they can validate that part and it's just inappropriate. And they do. They conjure a lot of things. It's really quite perverted that the standards that they suggest they have there aren't actually [adhered to].*

Without question, wāhine had to bear the burden of their partners' violence in multiple ways – the impacts on their physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual wellbeing; being responsible to secure a safe environment for their tamariki without the resources or support to do so; the risk of having their tamariki taken because of their partners' violence; and being ascribed total responsibility by those looking from the outside in. Hauku talked about having to manage her fear of her son being taken together with everything else happening in her life. This caused her to feel "beaten" by neighbours and people in the system in addition to the beatings her partner inflicted:

*Some stranger will ring the cops. I've got enough shit as it is to do, than have them expose [me]. And you know losing him [son]. That was my biggest fear, my son. Losing my son over me. Just beat you, abuse you, use you. You know they [people in the system] don't want to know when you've got nothing or when you're, at your most lowest point. That's how they beat me.*

It was at the times when wāhine needed caring, compassionate and empathetic people the most to assist them and their tamariki to be safe. Instead, they generally encountered unhelpful, judgmental people within services and, sometimes, among their whānau and friends. Far from getting help they were often framed as abusers of their tamariki.

When the system designed to assist wāhine and tamariki in Aotearoa denies assistance to wāhine, the system and those working within it become part of their entrapment in violent relationships.

## SYSTEMIC ENTRAPMENT

In addition to the fears wāhine held about their tamariki being taken, over varying lengths of time, partners became increasingly controlling, entrapping wāhine. When wāhine asked for help, they had generally exhausted their strategies to protect their tamariki and keep them and themselves safe. Those wāhine engaging with kaupapa Māori services felt accepted and a degree of comfort with the people within them despite their precarious situations. However, this was not the case for the majority of wāhine engaging with non-Māori services.

Wāhine reported the focus of agencies as primarily deficit-focused and reflecting a victim-blaming approach, lacking manaakitanga (kindness, generosity, caring for others) at a time when they most need people they engage with to understand the situational and contextual factors they are living within. Instead the focus of services was on what wāhine were not doing well and how they do not 'conform' in the ways in which the service representatives thought they should – detected in service providers' attitudes and frustrations.

The *Systemic Entrapment* of wāhine in their relationship does not have a singular point of origin – it is complex and multidimensional dependent upon the current circumstances of wāhine, their access to resources, and prior experiences with those services they need to secure the safety of them and their tamariki. Furthermore, engaging with services for the help they required was shrouded with feeling whakamā and becoming aware of their vulnerability relating to their situation and the need to ask for help. Wāhine needed help at this time because without it they could no longer provide care for their tamariki and keep them safe. Marama explained her the profound vulnerability she felt that triggered her reluctance to engage with organisations:

*Why didn't I ask for help? The mere thought of going to organisations for help engendered a sense of dread and hatred – I knew I wouldn't be welcome and the people in them were always quick to judge me. Besides they have taken my kids away.*

*The simple truth is, I didn't feel vulnerable getting the bash or being scared. I felt totally vulnerable having to go to organisations and ask for help. I no longer had a choice if I wanted to be in my child's life.*

Hana talked about what she needed from agencies:

*I don't want the people in the agencies or whoever it is to think, "Well, you know that's okay, you know it will resolve itself." That's not usually the case. That's not usually the case at all. It doesn't resolve itself, if anything it gets worse. It gets much worse. I just want whoever makes decisions, just make the decision that you know just be more present. Be more present. So that, the support network if they [wāhine] don't know where to go, at least they'll have you know the tools necessary to go get that person to help.*

Wāhine were not only entrapped by their partner's violence and their insecurity which then led to their misuse of power and engaging coercive control strategies, but also in most instances their inadequate access to resources and services to leave their partner, such as:

- feeling vulnerable;
- money, housing and security necessary to care for their tamariki;
- whakamā (profound sense of shame and embarrassment); fear that their tamariki will be taken;
- that they will be treated by people in the agencies designed to help them who are judgmental, who act on negative assumptions, and who are racist; and
- not getting the help they need by unhelpful services.

Hokaka explained how important the people in agencies were in helping getting her life on track, but it was not without having to share personal details repeatedly, and feeling she had no control over what was happening with her:

*I couldn't find my safe haven to say what was going on with me. So, statements like "Oh can you tell me what he did to you?" "Oh, really did he really do that?" "So, what else did he do?" It was more personal things that I was telling, not to only one person but another. That was the only thing that I had problems with. I did it because I knew that I*

*needed help. And, in order to get help I knew that I had to repeat myself, so I knew this is what's going on with you, and this is not good. What else did I have with other agencies? I felt not in control of my life. So, I needed help to help my life get back in track. At first, I found it mindboggling. Like I had no control over me or my kids. But as time went by, I realised without their help and without the time to crinkle out all the wrinkles of what was going on with us my family, I wouldn't be here today to be able to talk about this. So, without them, I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't be strong.*

Nonetheless, it is within the context of having few options, inadequate resources, and being whakamā and vulnerable that wāhine sought assistance from services knowing they were likely to encounter judgmental and unhelpful people.

## ENCOUNTERING BIAS, PREJUDICE AND RACISM

Faced with few options, wāhine made the best decisions they could informed by their current circumstances, although at some point in time each of the wāhine came to decisions that their situations were unsafe and untenable. Primarily, they could no longer protect themselves, keep their tamariki safe, and others (such as, whānau, friends, neighbours or work colleagues) in their social network, if they had one. Nonetheless, when wāhine Māori sought assistance, often instead of recognising how they had been surviving in exceedingly unsafe relationships, the spotlight turned onto their pathology and deficits, portraying them as 'victims.' Hana (as mentioned earlier) began her interview highlighting how she was forced to make the best decision for her tamariki and to leave the relationship. But faced with not having the resources to care for her tamariki if she left, she felt she was caught between a rock and a hard place:

*They just don't get it! They just don't get that if I leave [partner], I have no money, no job, no home, no food for my kids. But, if I stay, they have a roof over their heads, they will have food on the table, they will be warm at night, and they will be safe!*

Thus, for wāhine like Hana they had few options available to them, and therefore, required them to manage their partner's violence in the best ways that they could.

## UNHELPFUL PEOPLE

Wāhine provided numerous examples about their experiences of seeking help from agencies. Across wāhine, agency responses were usually unhelpful, reinforced their thoughts about no real help being available, and sometimes, compromised their safety. As Arataki shared being housed in a safe house ironically made her more unsettled:

*Women's Refuge do help with the safe house. But it just got very boring and very, very lonely in there, which isn't good. The house was huge. It was like a five-bedroom house. It was a very big house and it was scary at night. It was huge. I just couldn't stay there because it's just too scary – the back yard is huge. It's dark as and it was just too big.*

When asked about the support Arataki received to be safe, she went onto to talk about the help, using the Women's Refuge and a counsellor as examples:

*Not the greatest. I think they [Women's Refuge] need to upgrade their system, I guess. Because you know as much as I went to the Women's refuge for help, I still went back into the relationship.... Like you can be in love with this guy, it could be a good relationship everything's going great, but you've decided, "Oh, I'm not in love with him." You can just get up and leave. But the abusive relationship there's something there that's making you stay back, and I really don't know what it is. It's like you could talk to a female, I don't know like a counsellor. I've gone to a counsellor before and she's just like, "Yeah, but why are you still there?" They don't know the feeling of what it is. I don't even know what it is myself.*

Ahorangi talked about seeking help from the Police, and leaving wishing she had not gone to tell them about her situation:

*I remember going to the [city] central Police station and talking to the guy on desk, and telling him that I was afraid. He said, "What do you want us to do? What do you think we can do?" And it wasn't good experience actually. I kind of thought I wish I'd never gone there. So, I ended up having to contact the Women's Refuge myself. But I believe they've changed now. Well I hope they have.*



Some of the wāhine expressed defensive attitudes and put up a barrier as a protective mechanism. Such attitudes and barriers were driven by a lack of trust, fear, and not wanting to be treated poorly. Areta provided insights into how her fear of asking for help prompted her defensive attitude because she was expecting a negative response when she needed was a person willing to listen to her:

*You should not be afraid to go and seek help, but it's hopping over that threshold. I have a lot of reservation and had a lot of reluctance to go and talk to anybody. You're lucky that I'm talking to you. It's people like me that's got reservation, that are reluctant, that are a bit frightened. I'm even frightened of my own kids sometimes you know. I'm frightened of a lot of people. But it's my waha [mouth] and my like, get f'd attitude that pushes people away from me. And I can do that, push them as far as I want them to. But it's like you have to be able to find the person that you can actually go to. And you need to be able to find a bloody good listener. A hell of a good listener.*

All wāhine engaged with kaupapa Māori service providers, however, talked about having a better experience. They felt welcomed, no-one judged them, and the people working in the services understood their realities and were willing to work with them at their pace. Nevertheless, almost all the wāhine Māori encountering unhelpful people in other agencies who lacked empathy and compassion appeared to be the norm. Although a few wāhine talked about individuals in services and agencies making a difference for them. Wāhine expected unhelpful and disrespectful people, and most times people working in agencies and services confirmed their expectations.

Often, wāhine Māori left agencies and services feeling these people were not there to provide support – instead, they went left with little or no support, conflicting information, delays in having their needs met, and experiencing differential treatment. This left them with the conclusion that agencies and services were not there for Māori. Areta, Airini and Hana (respectively) all explained how the system was not there for them as wāhine Māori:

*It's not fair. It's not a fair world out there. The system has rocked it so bad that our Māori are just getting pushed away. Like if the tidal wave could come and pull us Māori in, we'd all go out in the fucking sea and that's the end of us. I think all those agencies, those know-it-all bastards, says to me it was the child upbringing. And I always say to them, "You carry your child, you have your child. From the day they get born, to the day they walk into school you teach them all what you know the rights from wrongs. the ayes from the nays dah, dah, dah." I say it's the change, it comes down to social pressures.*

*We don't want to introduce organisations [that is, add organisations into her life]. There's enough Māori that go to jail. We don't want to be ringing the Police, it's just another statistic.*

*You [people working in agencies and services] know they [wāhine Māori] need support. I don't want the people in the agencies or whoever it is to think well, "You know that's okay, you know it will resolve itself." That's not usually the case. That's not usually the case at all. It doesn't resolve itself. If anything, it gets worse. It gets much worse. I just want those, whoever makes decisions, just make the decision that you will just be more present. Be more present!*

It is in these ways that agencies and services have a role in the entrapment of wāhine Māori who are living with a violent partner.

Encountering negative experiences with the people within the services and not getting the help wāhine Māori need is mana-diminishing. It also reinforced the whakamā they already felt about themselves and their situation. Maia talked about how she felt as a result of continually encountering people with negative and disrespectful attitudes and the false accusations made about her:

*I recall the days where I've felt like a beaten-up dog on the ground, and I can tell you who made me feel like that. It was a little Oranga Tamariki social worker. She rolled up to my house one day unannounced. I hadn't expected her. [She] turns*

*up with I think it was affidavit or summons or something for court for [unborn baby] when I was carrying [him]. ... She says, "Oh these are for you [Maia], see you in court." I thought, "What the hell?" I thought, "Aren't you meant to like ring that you're coming or something? Don't just turn up on my doorstep." Anyway, I open this up. The thing is that she just left me. Honestly, I was like down like a dog. I was like kicked in the guts, kicked in the heart, kicked in the head with the psychological impact that this little shit had had on me in what she'd come up in her affidavit. I was seriously impaired for about two days. Of all these years you know, even the things that I've had done, that [ex-partner]'s done to me, never have I actually been psychologically, emotionally and physically impaired as I had been from her. I've had a gashed face, but I've been able to get over it. And I've had some real doozies and I've been able to get over. I don't cry spilt tears over him [ex-partner] anymore – if anything it's kind of a relief, I get a break. But with her, it was just...It was really taunting. I really felt injured. And I thought, "Oh my god." I needed to get some healing from that.*

Being served with court documents for removing her baby at birth in the way Maia outlined was dehumanising and had devastating impacts on her wellbeing. This left her totally powerless and alone to deal with the aftermath of someone who lacked compassion and empathy. Wāhine having to navigate and negotiate indifferent and seemingly heartless people working in agencies and services made it difficult for wāhine and their tamariki to be safe and bounce back psychologically.

## UNHELPFUL SERVICES

Some wāhine talked about a helpful person within a service or organisation, this however, was far from the norm. For outsiders looking in, their responses for keeping their tamariki and themselves safe may be inadequate and possibly inappropriate, but wāhine knew their partners and their behaviours. They chose their "battles" with care and due consideration particularly in the face of their partners' controlling behaviours and increasing anger that became unpredictable over time. Nevertheless, all the wāhine talked about unhelpful services and poor treatment by the people working in them. When wāhine were leaving a violent relationship and asking for help, for the most part, they had

exhausted their strategies and resources for keeping safe and their capabilities to protect their tamariki. When they asked for help, they needed it. Nonetheless, they encountered services that lacked responsiveness and support.

We found wāhine acted in smart and clever ways, drawing on a range of strategies aimed at keeping them and their tamariki safe while (a) caring about their partners, and (b) living in environments where outside help was generally not assured. They used numerous strategies to minimise or prevent violence, but oftentimes were unable to rely on whānau or agencies for assistance. When they asked for help, often they were unaware of the nature of help or what they could expect. Their fear intensified as they were questioned about what they were saying, not made any easier given agency and service responsiveness was usually slow or absent. Pounamu talked about this conundrum causing her to question her decision to involve the Police:

*I made my very first phone call to the Police, but the Police took 45 minutes to arrive. I was so anxious waiting, while the tamariki's father walked around our home with a homemade weapon. When I told him, we could no longer live like this, five minutes later he got his things. Prior to the Police arresting him his mother arrived – she glared at me with dead eyes. And I thought, "What does this mean? Does this mean I've done wrong? Does it mean I shouldn't have called the Police? Is she saying that it is wrong, that it's not acceptable?"*

Frequently wāhine were unsure about where to go for help or what to ask. It was not unusual for some of these wāhine to be socially isolated and not have access to televisions, the Internet, and other technology that would communicate the information that raised awareness of available help and where it could be obtained. Hana emphasized this, not knowing there was any help available for wāhine in her situation:

*I didn't know where to look. And I thought I was the only one going through this. I don't know at the time there were thousands of other wāhine just like me. At the time, I only just found out about a women's refuge. I didn't know what that was. There was no information out there. I just want these agencies to be really visible, so that people know. You need a reminder so that people don't forget, so people like me know that I can go there. I was not*

*going to any agency. I was too scared to go to any agencies for help. And at the time, I didn't know who to go to for help. Or you know who to go to for help. Because, domestic violence wasn't you know, nobody spoke about it. Nobody was aware of it. It was always you know swept under the carpet. it was always, "Oh no, you don't talk about that." So, I didn't go to any agencies. The support network, the very small support network that I had, was all that I had to keep me safe.*

Nonetheless, all wāhine talked about their partners' increasing psychological abuse featuring in their relationship. Initially subtle, with a gradual introduction of various forms of controlling behaviours. Overtime, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours intensified with physical and sexual violence occurring with varying frequency. While wāhine gradually became entrapped by their partner's violence and control strategies, the majority also talked about being entrapped by the system whose help was needed for their protection and safety and that of their tamariki.

## VIOLENCE LEAVES AN IMPRINT

Generally, wāhine unfairly shouldered the burden of responsibility for the violence inflicted on them, which added to the effects that they had already had to endure. Notably, some talked about adopting the judgments that they were 'bad mothers', failures, and violent. Moreover, these negative portrayals of wāhine were reinforced by people who did not provide any necessary assistance they may have needed. Pania desperately needed help after escaping from her violent partner who abducted her in the night. She could not understand why no one would help her:

*...I had to, walk, I was in pyjamas, got no shoes on. ... I was amazed. Amazed how many people had not stopped, there was cars going past. And not one stopped to ask if I needed a ride and, if you're alright. I would have jumped in the car and said, "Get me out of here!"*

For wāhine who grew up with violence, in State care, and had partners with gang associations, leaving and moving forward for them was not straight-forward and more complicated. For those wāhine with partners with gang association, they had added layers of complexity making it difficult to leave or stop the violence – these wāhine were not just leaving their partner but their gang

wāhānau. They had very little support from other wāhine in gangs because they were in similar positions, and because of the gang association they were often further marginalised by agencies and services.

Moreover, their association with gangs makes obtaining help and support more problematic, with some being excluded from help. Often these wāhine had engrained into them not to talk to agencies, including calling the Police. Letting others "in" was challenging, especially when past experiences and their lack of trust made making asking for help problematic and difficult. Ngaio explained that despite her obvious situation it made no difference in terms of getting help. Such responses reinforced the notion that people could not be trusted, and that agencies do not help:

*It's conditioning. You know I got told my whole life don't tell anyone about what goes on at home. Don't talk to social workers. Don't do this, don't do that. I never had any help. Yet everyone knew what was going on. Agencies knew what was going on. But because, we were saying everything was okay, when it wasn't, there's just no follow up. I just go so sick and tired of feeling like a victim. So, I spent a good part of 8 years because while I'd been on dates and I'd been in one relationship, I just could feel that I was starting to repeat the cycle all over again. So, I just, "Went no. Enough. I have to fix myself."*

Ahorangi explained how her fear and knowing she would not get the help she needed when she needed it (for instance, the Police would not come when called), despite having protection orders. She thought this was probably because of her (ex)partner's gang affiliations. This led to her sense of desperation and the decision to take steps to protect herself and her tamariki:

*In the end I went through the protection order and all that sort of stuff. But, it's that whole thing about being scared to use it [the protection order]. I felt really threatened and there would be repercussions that sort of thing. It's quite an awful predicament to be in. So much so that I actually thought I'm never going to get out of this. I was so anxious and stupid. I had a friend's 303 rifle in my ceiling of my house. I thought I'm going to kill that bastard! It's either him or you that's the only way I could see out of it.*



Wāhine are at different stages in their healing journey, oftentimes moving from being stuck to acting effectively. This journey does not come with a standard formula and varies from wāhine to wāhine. What is clear that is that the ideologies that inform current services and approaches are either not relevant or helpful. Interestingly, most wāhine indicated that “counselling” did not work, especially having to relive the violence through talking about it and having to recount their lives in court cases where the accuracy of what they were saying was challenged and questioned. It was not unusual for the wāhine to have difficulty believing the violence themselves, including the nature of the sexual violence some endured. To then have to relive it and talk about it only to be questioned because what they say their experiences was is seen to be unbelievable.

What was clear in the wāhine pūrākau is that healing took time, and that strengthening their cultural identity, learning mātauranga such as pūrākau and cultural values and practices was more helpful for their healing. Maia, estranged from her whānau because of the involvement of Oranga Tamariki, talked about how she returned to her Māori cultural values that she grew up with – values that promoted mana wahine:

*I've gone back to the values of my mother and the values of my father and the values of my grandparents, and so forth. That's what gives me my foundation and my grounding. And I think also when you do that it'll give certainty to your whānau to have confidence in our abilities to mother our tamariki safely, and I think that's really what they want.*

Unsurprisingly, these wāhine generally had more affinity for kaupapa Māori-led services – they claimed the people working within them were welcoming, non-judgmental, listened, valued whānau, and supported their development as wāhine Māori. They indicated that while healing and changing was a long-term endeavour that was not straight forward or a linear process, strengthening their identity as wāhine Māori and being connected to cultural values and practices was an important part of this process. Being surrounded by people who were compassionate and empathetic, and importantly who believed them, was crucial for their healing process.

## CONCLUSION

The findings from *E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau* signals an urgent need to challenge current conversations and narratives that promote harmful constructions of wāhine Māori when they most need help. Wāhine often encounter and navigate complex and complicated spaces daily. Undoubtedly, living with violence on a daily or regular basis has multiple and long-lasting effects. These sometimes leave wāhine in dark and conflicted places, and negatively influenced their ability to trust people. Indeed, these wāhine trusted few people. Arorangi indicated how her trust of people centred on those people (including those in agencies) who helped her with her tamariki:

*I had attitude, like I had a real bullshit attitude because simply of what I've been through. Very few people, even now at my age now that I trust. Very, very few people that I trust. I still trust all these agencies though but, I mean personally. But you don't need to worry because I trust you [interviewer]. Anybody, anybody that helps out, helps my baby out and you know they're always going to be part of my heart, ae [yes].*

Nevertheless, we found experiences of wāhine, like Arorangi's, is the exception rather than the rule. Seeking and securing help for the wāhine participating in this research was fraught, particularly as they feared their tamariki would be taken. Not only were they entrapped by their partner and personal fears and circumstances that made it difficult to seek help, the system designed to provide them help often made seeking help complicated, challenging and problematic. It is within these contexts that wāhine manage their safety by drawing on their internal resources.

# KEEPING SAFE

**Ko tōu kahuwai ā-rangi hei whakaruruhau**

**Ko koe hoki te hua o te kākano whakatōhia**

Your mother's positive caring influences provides shelter for you,

the sacred seed that was nurtured within her

*Keeping Safe* refers to the range of strategies and decisions wāhine used to respond to and prevent potentially violent situations escalating, and where possible, to shelter and protect their tamariki from the violence unfolding before them. Their prime motivation was to protect others first, and in order to do this they needed to protect themselves. To some extent, wāhine could not rely on others to support them in *Keeping Safe*, because:

- asking for help from others or agencies could increase the risk to their tamariki and themselves;
- they were isolated; or
- to involve other people (such as whānau or friends) would potentially compromise their safety.

So, *Keeping Safe* was undertaken predominately in isolation.

For some wāhine, violence was a new phenomenon and experience. For instance, Maia grew-up in a whānau without violence and where wāhine had equal standing with men. She said:

*It didn't become overtly violent when there was domestic violence starting to happen [until] maybe, two months after [son] was born, so things were starting to become stressful and domestic-wise. So, two months there was a lot of arguing. Lot of arguing. It became physical when I started to physically assert myself. I learned from [ex-partner] too that you don't stand up to a man. I didn't know that. I didn't even know that [violence] should even exist. But in his world, you don't step up to a man, and if you're going to step up to a man, well you're going to get it like a man. That was the whaakaro in [ex-partner's] world, in his domain. So, his house was his domain. He was the king of the kingdom. I didn't really know what my role was when, it was that kind of hierarchy. Except perhaps just that I was a mother.*

The safety strategies wāhine used to protect themselves and others were a paradox that were both adaptive and maladaptive, including intentionally isolating themselves from friends, whānau, neighbours and agencies to avoid likely consequences. By calling upon the most appropriate strategies given the context of the situation at the time, the wāhine aimed to optimise the safety of their tamariki (first and foremost), their own safety as well

that of their whānau, friends, and neighbours. Adaptive safety strategies emerged from a process of coming to understand the triggers that led to their partners' abusive and violent behaviours. Maladaptive safety strategies centred on accommodating their partners' needs and wants in the process of maintaining a safe environment. To this end, wāhine utilised numerous strategies to keep their tamariki and themselves safe, including *protecting others* through using strategies such as *compliance*, *silence*, and *placating and mediating*; and *Preventing Violence* by *knowing the triggers*, *being strong*, and *downplaying the violence* (Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1 Keeping Safe – sub-themes**



## PROTECTING OTHERS

Wāhine invested energy and care in preventing potential harm caused by their partner and optimising the safety of their tamariki, which was their priority. Even though they talked about their partners being 'good dads or step-dads' they respected they were the father of their tamariki. Ahorangi illustrated this, explaining the reason for his violence when she said:

*I didn't, I never had any concerns. He was a good dad. Good stepdad. It was just, I guess I put it down to environment and gang stuff, and all of that.*

Protecting their tamariki within the context of unfolding violence was their priority and their key motivation. Trapped and sometimes in isolation, the wāhine then did what they had to do, responding to abuse and violence in the most appropriate way depending upon the context within which it was occurring. It was a choice they made, mediated by knowing the cues and triggers that lead to violence all the while being aware of possible consequences. Their actions and responses were primarily aimed at preventing violence and demonstrated the intelligence and the knowing these wāhine possessed to minimise their partners' violence and its severity. They used a range of strategies for *Protecting Others* (Figure 5.2).

In aiming to minimise the impact of their partners' violence, knowing what was safe and what was not safe was a combination of personal knowledge, wisdom and increasing maturity in their relationships that gave the wāhine an inner strength and fortitude. This was a process, and for some a life-long process. Airini talked about becoming stronger by growing into her relationship and coming to expect better for not only herself, but also for her tamariki:

*I think just maturing in a relationship is helpful. But I just think that mainly our progression has been because different standards have been lived. And you know I can say I expect better because I live better. Whereas before if I say expect better and I'm not living better myself, then I'm a bit of a hypocrite myself.*



The wāhine then did what they had to do to keep themselves safe so they could protect their tamariki. For some wāhine, violence was a familiar feature in their lives but for others it was a new phenomenon that confronted them, requiring them to learn how to 'read' and predict their partners' behaviours. Pania talked about knowing what her ex-partner was capable of and made an instant decision that she needed to protect others asleep in her friend's home when he threatened to kill her friend and the tamariki asleep in the house:

*He woke me up. He had a fork and I felt something over me kind of thing. And, with a fork and he was like, "Shhh. Come with me." And, I just started freaking out with these kids, my friend, you know. They're like family to me those ones.*

Thinking about the need to protect others, Pania provided an example of how compliance was also a strategy for keeping safe. We found wāhine Māori used a range of strategies to protect others (Appendix 4.1), as Hana describes:

*I'd always go down to our bedroom and lock the door because it was a huge door you couldn't get into it, and once you locked it you know you just couldn't get through. Just couldn't get through. And if I couldn't get to the bedroom, I would always grab the kids and I would always make sure to have my keys on me. And I would park my car in a certain part of the driveway, so I could get out of there quickly. I'd just throw the kids, I remember taking off at half past 8, 9 o'clock at night with the kids in their pyjamas still. Sometimes I would go to my sisters. Sometimes I would go to mum and dads. Mum would always ask me, "Are you okay?" I was just like, "I just needed to take the kids." I would make any excuse. I would lie through my teeth to make sure my family didn't know what was going on. You know I would lie through my teeth. "No, no I'm fine." "No, the kids are restless." You know things like that, and I've never lied, you know I've never done that.*

Kiri also talked about her strategy for keeping safe:

*I wasn't allowed to see my family. I'd have to sneak and go online and ask please can you come and get my kids at school dah, dah, dah, dah, dah? Yeah, I'm going to get a hiding, but I don't care. ... there's*

*plenty of situations I've put myself in and I've got mean hidings for it but it's in order to keep my kids safe. ... I'd lock my tamariki in the room, then he'll beat me up, lock me in the room and then he'll go to my kids. Not saying that he's beaten them up, but he hasn't been very nice to them either.*

## COMPLIANCE

Compliance was a response to partners' increasing surveillance of their activities and who wāhine interacted with that included their phones, email, and social media. Overtime, their partners' control came to include manipulation, surveillance and threats to their life and wellbeing and that but of their tamariki, whānau, friends and others like their neighbours. The wāhine responded to these situations with the prime goals of survival and protecting their tamariki. Anahera talked about how she accommodated her partner's needs:

*I would keep myself safe. I knew what tipped him. So, I tried to prevent that from happening. And unfortunately, I had to give a lot of myself and my wants and needs to accommodate to his needs to keep myself safe. It became a different story when we had tamariki because then you also had another being to try and keep safe. It was when I saw physically what he had done to our older son that I knew this wasn't right. I told family members what he was doing.*

Compliance was used by wāhine as a deliberate safety measure employed all the while knowing their partner was getting away with being responsible for their actions, as Kiri shared:

*So, I would just agree with him even though half the time he was wrong. It was just safer for me to agree. He would say a lot of things, a lot of things that weren't true, make-up stories. But I would just have to agree as much as I really didn't want to. Really pissed me off having to lie like just to go his way it was better for me, saved me from getting a hiding, unnecessary hiding.*

Utilising a primal intelligence together with their inner strength, they used these to survive. In doing so, wāhine formed a metaphorical alliance of safety with their partners, who had become their captors. Thus, they made crucial context-informed decisions, responding to the situational cues and changing contexts. Compliance,

Figure 5.2. Examples of strategies wāhine use for protecting others



at times, looked like subservience for some of the wāhine, for others it involved criminal activities that led to prison for two wāhine. Amiria talked about the compliance strategies she used to avoid her partner's violence:

*Well besides getting beaten up all the time and not knowing who to turn to, or scared for my life and my tamariki, I just shut down. I lived the way he asked me to live pretty much. I knew what would piss him off and how far to push him, and what was his triggers. I'm a person, my nature as a person, who likes to keep the peace. So, I would do anything that he would ask even if I didn't agree with it just to keep it safe for myself and my tamariki. And I would allow him to treat me like peasant and a slave just so I didn't get a hiding from him. And my tamariki were the same. We were never allowed to just express ourselves and be ourselves. So, it wasn't safe.*

## SILENCE

In *Keeping Safe* and *Protecting others*, wāhine frequently suffered in silence their relationships. Fear of losing their minds and hiding their scars of violence, prompted wāhine to remain silent by either not speaking about the violence they faced or electing to hide for periods of time. Telling others put them and their tamariki at further risk, so they determined for silence was in their best interests. Ahorangi talked about keeping the violence she was enduring to selected people, avoiding telling her whānau because she did not want them to know what was happening.

*Well I didn't go to family because I didn't want them to know what was happening. I hid from family. It was my friends who knew, one friend in particular that I could go and stay with anytime. She was not backwards in coming forwards. If he came around because he knew where she lived, and knew where I might be, she would tell him to piss off. But it's not so easy to do.*

Silence and going into 'hiding' were strategies wāhine used, knowing the fear and consequences associated with seeking help. For some wāhine living with extremes and unpredictability on a regular or daily basis they claimed their partners' violence and control had spiritual and emotional tolls. Nothing they did was good enough. Kiri talked about her partner's obsessiveness and control, forbidding her to use social media:

*I wasn't allowed FaceBook anymore or a cell phone. He became violent when we would go out in public if another man looked at me – he would hit me. Like it's my fault this other male is looking at me. So, to keep myself safe and to prevent anything like anything would trigger him off. Because he was so insecure. So, to keep myself safe I would not contact any of my friends. Because if I did catch up with them without him knowing they would tag me on posts in FaceBook To keep myself safe from that I would just stop associating with my friends. Would try and minimise the times we would go out in public. I only did it if I needed to.*

For some wāhine, this became an emotionally and spiritually 'dark place', diminishing their mana, wairua, and self-worth. Anahera talked about the connection between contact with her whānau and friends and the severity of the violence she endured that also included being strangled to the point she would lose consciousness:

*When things didn't go his way or I would want to go and see family, he didn't want me to leave the house. He would pull me back inside the house physically. If I said anything, he would strangle me. So that's putting, you know, both hands around my neck to the point where I would pass out. Lifting me onto the wall because at that time I was quite small-sized – he was a big guy. That happened several times throughout that relationship or that time in our relationship. It did become a little bit more frequent happening probably at least three four times a month. So, things like getting stuff thrown at you, plates smashing, and it would be just any little thing would set him off. So, I just got to the point where I kept myself isolated, because whenever people come over, he would be angry when they left. If I was talking to somebody on the phone, he would get angry and there were always consequences. And then the kids were*

*crying too much, there was always consequences. Unfortunately, the violence got worse. When I say it got worse, he not only strangled me, it was the bruises and punches that started happening. So, the emotional abuse was going on, the physical violence got worse and worse, and I was around about four months pregnant with our last child when he put me in hospital. So, he gave me a good hiding, to the point where he stomped me to the ground several times.*

While silence and the isolation that accompanies it are strategies the wāhine Māori in our research used to keep themselves and others safe, it also negatively impacted their mana and wairua. It impacted their abilities to function, to sleep, feeling numb, scared, worried about their tamariki being hurt, all leading to self-blame and 'walking on eggshells.' Repeated trauma and non-fatal strangulation did not help. Despite all of this, wāhine focused on presenting a pretence that all was well. As Hana said:

*The outside world thought, you know, it was perfect.*

## PLACATING AND MEDIATING

The wāhine talked about *placating and mediating* as strategies to prevent violence. For some wāhine, this strategy was learnt growing up with violence in their whānau. At a young age these wāhine recognised that they had a different relationship with their abusive parent or step-parent than their siblings. Recognising the vulnerability and fragility of others specifically related to their partner's violence, they could leverage this 'special' relationship to protect their siblings and mothers. Marika, for instance, talked about similarities she had with her father that her other siblings did not possess. She was able to use the relationship with her father to navigate the violence with the aim of protecting others:

*I looked more like my dad and I was more like my dad than anybody else. And therefore, there was a difference. My sister will tell you growing up I was always daddy's little princess and bits and pieces like that. Didn't mean that I didn't get the crap beaten out of me at times, but he and I had a different relationship. That meant that I could do things differently, like get in the way,*



*like talk him down, like bits and pieces that [my siblings] couldn't do because they didn't have that relationship with him.*

Piata also talked about the protector role she possessed, leveraging off the knowledge that her step-father did not hit her, despite his displaying threatening behaviours towards her at times:

*Never to me, and I'm not sure why that was, but to my mother and to the other tamariki incredibly horrible violence. I ended up being the one that stood up to him a lot of the times, and he did come close to punching me in the face and knocking me down, but he'd always get like this close and shake his fist. But he never did it, ever. So, I became kind of the protector, keeping everyone safe.*

At an early age, being the protector of siblings and mothers enabled these wāhine to stand up to their mother's partner. They maintained a proximity to and surveillance of the various whānau members, acting to prevent a situation from escalating by using a range of strategies, such as knowing where everyone was at all times, using themselves as distractions; intervening and getting in between the user of violence and their target so they could get away; hiding knives at night; and creating a 'stranger danger' plan to get Police to respond. Ngaire talked about getting in the middle in a violent altercation of her father and brother:

*My brother got really big hidings. Things were strict in our house. My dad's quite an authoritative figure, everybody had to listen to him. Not just our family but everyone in his environment. But, in saying that he did earn respect too. He'd grown up that way, that was how he was brought up. So, being around that I've always wanted to protect people that [are] getting hurt and are more vulnerable, I guess. With my brother, I would get to the point where I would be standing in front of him so he wouldn't get a hiding.*

Piata described some of the strategies she used, always aware of the potential for violence:

*Some of the ways of doing that [being a protector] would be to ensure that his son who we lived with, my step-brother, was always protected and never alone because he'd [step-father] bash the shit out of him. And always trying to protect my mother,*

*always making sure I knew where she was, what time they'd come home. I would deny myself from going to camp or school because I knew something would happen if I wasn't there. Keeping safe for me meant hiding the knives at night.*

Marika talked about mediating one night when her father was being violent, abandoning comforting her sister to aid her brother:

*At that point I came out. Dad picked my brother up by his ankle and threw him into the wall. At that point I got in the way. Then it was just a case of pushing back against dad as he kept trying to pick my brother and throw him into the wall. But you know it was just a case of just getting in the way, pushing him back, pushing him back. Because my dad and I had the kind of relationship where I might get a whack, I might get a couple of whacks for doing it, but eventually he would stop.*

Placating and mediating became necessary ways wāhine undertook to talk-down or appease their partners' demands and aggression.

## WĀHINE USE OF VIOLENCE

Over time there were costs as these wāhine were unable to be themselves and act freely while living with the constant unpredictable behaviours of their partners, which for some fuelled their own anger. One-third of the wāhine talked about how they came to use violence themselves to keep them and their tamariki safe. The accounts of wāhine use of violence indicated a safety response – that is, they responded physically with the aim of stopping or preventing further harm to either themselves or their tamariki. Although, this was not always recognised when Police became involved when called to their homes.

Wāhine use of violence was also a response to long-term and constant disrespect, being pushed around and assaulted repeatedly by their partners. For some wāhine, they got to a point where they no longer wanted to tolerate the violence they were living with when there was no useful or relevant assistance available to them. It was a way of getting taken seriously. Haeata talked about her exasperation with her partner, making her feel violent:

*Well now he's making me feel violent and I'm like having to be the one to try and throw him out. I'm at the point where I'm getting all hysterical where I want to actually hurt him. And he's not worth it. To the point where I'm actually saying words, but I don't mean to. But I'm, man will I be capable of you know hurting him or practically stabbing him or throwing something at him. Because he just won't get out of my home. To the point where I end up breaking stuff in my home.*

Marama reacted to being trampled on by everyone decided to make a stand and fought back one time when her partner was being violent:

*It taught him I can attack when I want to. And that, "I will attack you [partner] if you keep abusing me, because I am sick of this shit!"*

While wāhine talked about knowing it was not okay to use violence and expressed remorse about hurting someone else because of contexts of violence, gangs, crime and drugs. These contexts compounded their need to keep safe and protect their tamariki while faced with having little or no help. Using violence was a strategy was about these wāhine being strong amidst being unsafe.

## PREVENTING VIOLENCE

Wāhine often responded to their situations within contexts of unpredictable violent or verbally and psychologically threatening situations. In doing so, their pūrākau provided examples of being smart, clever and innovative in the safety strategies they employed. Nevertheless, these wāhine also knew their limits – when to say something and when to keep quiet – speaking about what was happening outside of their homes was the time to keep quiet. It is important to note that violence was never a feature of the relationships wāhine Māori entered with their partners who over time came to use violence. Their partners' low-level emotional and psychological abuse and 'game-playing' gradually made an appearance over varying lengths of time for the majority of wāhine. They came to 'know' their partner, and oftentimes, were able to read the atmosphere leading up to their use of violence. Aimiria talked about her partner's manipulation and game-playing and taking actions to protect herself:

*I just used to lock myself up. Oh, games that's his best thing. He loves manipulating, playing games. Mind-controlling, he's still doing it.*

Preventing Violence for these wāhine was, as already mentioned, motivated by the need to protect their tamariki and others in the best ways they could. Although, they did so knowing they encountered consequences for openly responding in ways that their partners did not appreciate. Consequences could include: a range of threats against their tamariki, themselves and their whānau, friends and sometimes neighbours; further physical violence and sexual violence; and a range of other forms of punishment. For most of the wāhine, the violence progressed to physical and sexual violence, beginning over varying periods of time, increasing in severity and frequency. For some wāhine, the violence began after a relatively short period of about three months although for one wāhine it did not begin for 12 years. Airini did not realise the situation she was in was unsafe at the time:

*I can't really remember the feeling of feeling unsafe. Probably just confusion and unsurety, doubt. You know because I was still young too, so life was about trying to have fun, and grow up at the same time. And I think trying to be a parent at the same time at a young age. I don't remember the unsafeness, although everyone else probably would have seen it was unsafe.*

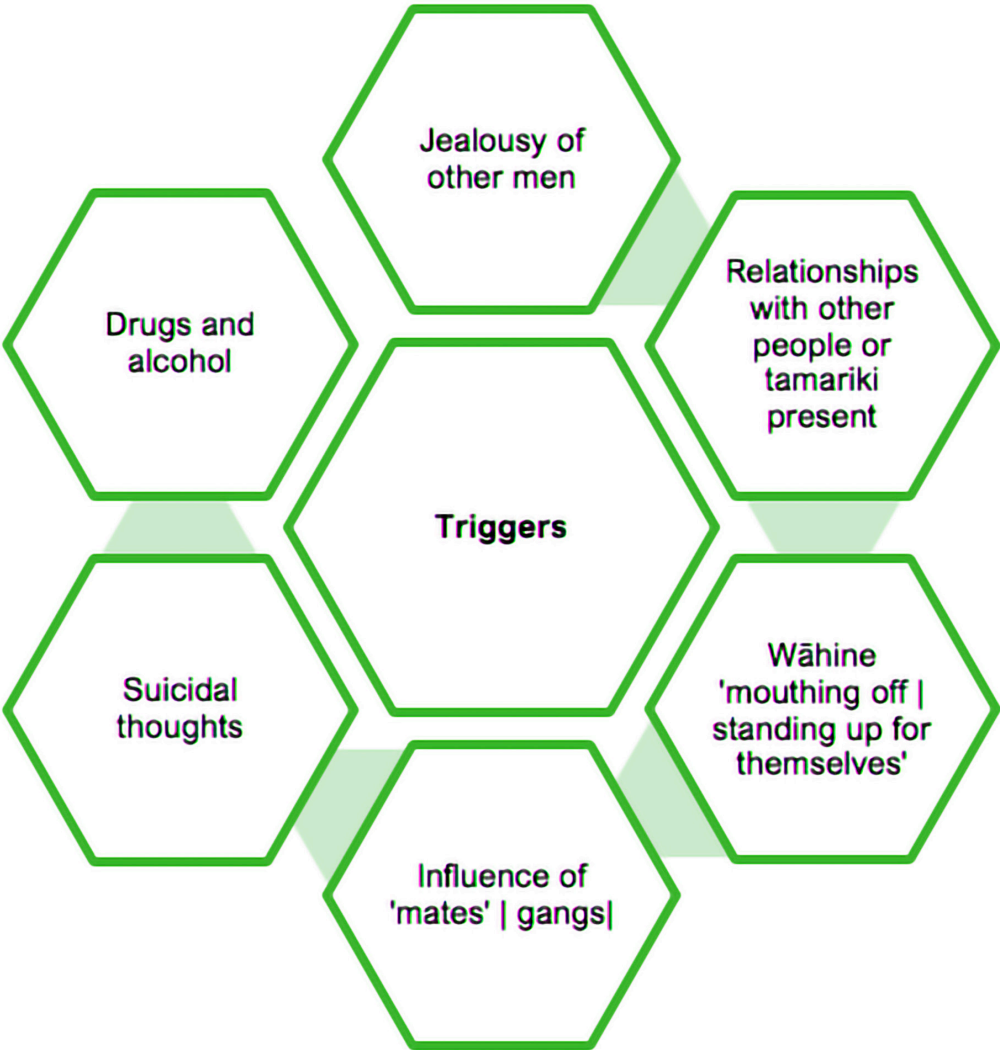
Consequently, their actions and decisions were governed by this imperative to maintain and secure the safety and wellbeing of their tamariki but was limited by the resources they had access to. Their actions and decisions also dependent upon the unfolding context of, at times, unpredictable situations unfolding within their homes. Nevertheless, they did this by *knowing the triggers (consequences and repercussions) and being strong*.

## KNOWING THE TRIGGERS

*Knowing the triggers* involved wāhine using a 'primal intelligence' that directed their actions and aided detecting their partners' potential violent and abusive episodes and surviving (Figure 5.3). They did this all the while knowing the consequences and repercussions for the actions and decisions they made. Their primal intelligence is grounded in a ngākau (seat of heart, mind and soul) level of knowing that enabled wāhine

to 'read' their partner's behaviours and body and facial language, vibes and to instinctively know the triggers for their partners' violence. They made their decisions according to the context at the time, responding in the best way given the circumstances. For wāhine, context determined the responses they make in any given situation to survive and keep as safe as possible.

Figure 5.3: Range of triggers for impending violence





Contextually bound decision-making required wāhine to respond to subtle cues that for others goes unobserved and not recognised. These cues involved the imperceptible look in their partners' eyes, staring with "dead eyes", the slight rise of an eyebrow, the restrained way they drew breath – unnoticed by others, but noted by wāhine who responded accordingly. Pounamu talked about finally having the courage to leave her partner to make a better life for her tamariki, only to have him electronically bailed down the road. From there, her ex-partner could continue his violence and abuse with no regard of the protection orders she secured, which no one will enforce:

*Now, I only have half my freedom, because he is still here. He physically and sexually abuses his tamariki's mother in front of them! No one in the agencies will help keep him away from us – they say I agreed for him to live down the road. I had no choice to agree because I knew from the look on his face and how he held his body that if I didn't agree, we would suffer even more.*

Context counted for wāhine, and they responded according to the particular context at the time. Pounamu's situation clearly demonstrated how those making decisions about wāhine and their tamariki did so with little cognisance of their contexts and realities, and the dynamics of violence within the whānau. Piata highlighted the utmost need care when strategizing, because anything that deviated from 'normal' or usual routines drew attention to any differences:

*You have to be careful when you strategize. Like I said, any deviation from the normal he would smell it out, [and ask] "What are you doing?" You know, "Why are you doing this for?" And he'd come up with stories of even when we weren't doing anything, you know, "Why are you doing this for? You're getting the Police involved? Are you monitoring me?" All this stuff, it's like God!*

Wāhine survived because they knew, for the most part, what triggered their partners' violent outbursts. Wāhine sometimes put themselves at greater risk if it meant securing the safety of their tamariki (Figure 5.2). Those wāhine talking about partners using meth, described them as good caring partners and fathers who became "monsters" and "ugly" people when they used this drug, and whose violence was particularly severe. But their partners' and whānau drinking alcohol prompted them

to not drink themselves so that they could monitor what was happening – if things looked like they would become violent they were able to leave with their tamariki or move them to a safer place. Arataki talked about her preference was to get a baby-sitter, controlling her drinking alcohol around her tamariki so they would not be present:

*I never ever drunk around my kids like, I'd always find a babysitter. If I'm going to drink around the kids it's just mellow drink like you just sit there and have a few cans, you don't get wasted. I would never do that because the fact is that my ex-partner would get absolutely wasted and just be an egg, so it was pointless. So, every time he was like, "Oh we'll have a drink." And I was like, "Yeah okay, but I'll find a babysitter." Before that and then it's like a big no. but he'd still drink.*

The wāhine in this research clearly knew the consequences and repercussions for the decisions that they made, not only for themselves, but for their tamariki and in some instances their friends, whānau and others. They then acted accordingly for the best interests of others around them. While many wāhine talked about becoming increasingly isolated, some also talked about deliberately isolating themselves from friends, families and neighbours because they feared consequences for them and their tamariki. This type of functioning was instinctual, something that was not taught, and their actions were not seen as being brave or courageous. They talked about not being able to rely on anyone outside, motivating them to react – for instance, Police failed to respond, nobody including whānau intervened, and while what was happening in their homes was 'hidden' they realised people did know. These wāhine recognised the limits of their 'powers', not always being able to stop either the physical or emotional abuse that occurred.

## BEING STRONG

*Being strong* involved wāhine exercising choice and drawing on their experiences to aid them working their way to getting on the 'right path.' Wāhine worked hard at trying to be mothers, wives, and for some, being perfect – but, it took time and energy especially when there was little help to call upon or the help, they should be able access does not come to fruition. Often the messages wāhine received was that they need to make the best of their bad situation, as Hana shared:

***My mum was adamant he was not the one for me. And she told me that. She said to me after I had my first child, to him, she said, "Well baby's here now, you'll just have to make the best of a bad situation." And at the time I didn't really understand why you know I was angry at my mum why she said it. But I didn't understand because being young and naive you know what did I know?***

Importantly, their strength occurs within relationships whereby partners do not support or encourage them in any way to better themselves. It is the inner strength of wāhine in this research that helped them to endure their partners' violence. It is *being strong* that eventually gets them out of their relationship, or for some, seeking the help to repair their relationship. Notably, through everything these wāhine endure they remain strong.

*Being Strong* requires wāhine to draw on their strength and support, but in doing so it is a time that they become susceptible to further abuse. Some of the wāhine referred to needing people to ask if they were okay, but they rarely encountered people who did this. As Mahuika explained, when wāhine come to recognise there is something wrong in a relationship whānau, friends and people in agencies could assist in "planting the seeds," and reinforce their uniqueness and strength is important:

***It's planting seeds even. Telling people don't be shy. To tell someone that they're special because everybody's here for a purpose. You know and when you know that's solid inside yourself you can share that with people, and it does help them. And it's good. You know and even if they just don't believe it to start with, you know somewhere, somewhere inside them they do take it on.***

Some wāhine talked about the messages and strength of older wāhine like their grandmothers that came to inform their present situations and assisted them to change their futures. Maia drew upon the values of the time when she was growing up:

***I've gone back to the values of my mother and the values of my father and the values of my grandparents and, and so forth. That's what gives me my foundation and my grounding. And I think when you do that it'll give certainty to your whanau too, and have confidence in our abilities to mother our tamariki safely, and I think that's really what they [whānau] want.***

*Being strong* provided wāhine with a platform for healing and to uplift and revive their wellbeing, albeit took what seemed like a long time. Aimiria talked about wāhine needing to find this strength within themselves to enable them to move forward:

***Well basically I guess how to get out of it [you have to] find your strength, for a woman to find her strength to make a plan and make it happen basically. Make a plan, get steps, get people to help and then make it happen in order to get out of there.***

In this way, *Being Strong* enabled wāhine to exercise their choice with the aid of their experience of their daily realities. *Being strong* also enabled them to let people into their lives, to help.

***You know either going to family, probably turning to family. And family being around. But then there's a point where they sort of have enough and so you just try and manage it on your own. But I've always had good support around me, I guess, even his family to a degree you know were supportive, and yeah they helped.***

It appears when wāhine feel strong or strength, this came about through a process of un-silencing – that is, telling others about the violence within their whānau and deciding to stop hiding what is happening to them and their children. It is in this moment when they recognise their vulnerability because being strong and empowered is not what their partner wanted them to be. Vulnerability for these wāhine differs from the common understandings that women who are vulnerable are at-risk of harm in some way or shape. It is their strength that gets them out of their relationships or to seek help to repair it, because as Marita indicated:

***You can't rely on anybody. Nobody's going to be stable. Nobody's going to do what you need them to do so you do it yourself.***

## DOWNPLAYING THE VIOLENCE

Most wāhine did not enter their relationships thinking about violence, primarily because their relationships never started with violence. Instead, they entered relationships for various reasons like attraction, company, and for some, the sexual intimacy. In fact as already mentioned, physical violence did not appear

until anywhere from between three months and up to 12 years for one wāhine. Nevertheless, their partners all became gradually controlling and emotionally abusive over varying lengths of time. This abuse increased in intensity and frequency, eventually progressing to psychological abuse, coercive control and surveillance of their activities and other relationships with whānau, friends and co-workers. In retrospect, while some wāhine could see when they entered their relationships there may have been warning signs of possible problems, but they “hadn’t really thought about it [being in a violent relationship]” because initially there was not a need to do so.

## DETERIORATING RELATIONSHIPS

*Downplaying the violence* begins by entering a relationship that was not violent but becomes unsafe on many levels as the relationship deteriorates. Wāhine coped with this deterioration by *downplaying the violence*. Airini talked about *downplaying the violence* she was living with, minimising its severity, using what is publicised in the media as a benchmark:

*I think when we talk about violence it was more verbal, lots of verbal and pushing around. Not like punching in the face and stuff like that. So, I think that’s what was downplayed. But then there have been a couple of times where I did a hit or something like that. When I think about violence, I guess when it’s publicised it’s way more worse [than violence she was living with]. Think of the worst rather than what the minimum is really.*

The realities of the violence were not seen to be something of concern at the time, but looking back on their experiences wāhine viewed it in a different way. For instance, for Maia the violence and abuse did not start until after the birth of her first pepi, but her partner’s controlling behaviours were evident:

*I learned that there was a code of different ethics when it came to welfare. I learned, in that time of living together, that there was a code of what you say and don’t say to people who come into the home. So, [when] I was seeing Family Start for my pre-baby care stuff there was certain things that I wasn’t allowed to talk about. When I look back on it now that part was quite stressful. It was a controlled environment when it came to people coming in. I wasn’t allowed to tell about too many things.*

Marita explained how she managed the “bad times” by preferring to focus on the “good times”:

*So, there’s two things that you did with those situations. One is that you hoard them, you hoard the memories of those so in the bad times you can say but there are good times you know. That there are times that are fun and amazing and but there are also times that are, shitty and horrible. So, you hoard those memories and, and it’s, it’s a justification to use as okay today was a bad day but we’ll get back to those good days and have those good days again. The other thing, when you look at the clouds and it’s an overcast day, but the sun is shining behind the clouds and you see those rays of sunlight coming through it’s like that. You know that there are breaks in the cloud, and you just have to hang in and get to one of those breaks and you’re going to have good times. For me there’s kind of three times you have the good times, you have the bad times and you have the in between times and it’s in the in between times that you’re always, “Is this going to, is this going to, is this going to?” And in the good times it’s kind of like you just need to let everything go. You need to let go the hurt, everything and just enjoy. Just be in the moment, just enjoy that moment.*

Aiding *downplaying the violence* is wāhine recognising their partner has his own story, which often goes unheard. They needed to be strong until their tane could undergo the healing that was needed, as Airini explained:

*From my experience and my understanding, my husband who I love dearly, he’s got a story. And I think for men sometimes their story is not heard, and in their stories there’s a lot of healing that has to take place. So you know the questions are why do they do what they do [violent behaviours]? Where does it stem from? And until they start healing, they start feeling better about who they are, they’re likely to use you as a battering pole.*

Nevertheless, over time wāhine began to feel unsafe at many levels. For some wāhine they were not well equipped to deal with the changes that were happening in their relationships, while for others because it was a normal part of the life. But their partner becomes unpredictable, with violent outbursts which varied in frequency. The inner strength of wāhine and their

ability to function on experience and gut instinct helped them to cope but telling anyone was fraught primarily because it increased the risk of harm to themselves and their tamariki. Moreover, past experiences also informed decisions wāhine made about letting others into their life. Despite calling on her whānau for support, Airini highlighted how difficult it was to ring the Police for instance.

*It was never to ring the cops or anything like that. They were probably off the radar because you were a bit unsure whether there would be more trouble. You're confused because you think you love this person. Yeah, ringing Police was probably one of the hardest things.*

In addition to many wāhine recognising their partner had a story, the connection wāhine had to their partner was a commitment and an investment in them, so walking away was not an easy option. Fighting for their partners' attention, love and respect oftentimes occurred amid contexts of addictions and unpredictable abusive and violent behaviours. Wāhine recognised their relationship was deteriorating but all the while they kept their tamariki central to the actions, prioritising their safety and protection and went to lengths to hide what was happening within their relationship, as Ahorangi talked about:

*The worst thing about the tamariki was they never were a target of any physical abuse or anything. They didn't know the extent of what was happening. I tried to hide things from them and keep it away from them, but of course they did know.*

In addition, the living with extremes, violence without apparent cause, and the effects of addictions and alcohol were signs of a deteriorating relationship. The extremes continued all the while violence was escalating. There focus turned to keeping themselves and their tamariki as safe as possible and acting on the need to obtain help from others. This maturation in a relationship provided a sense of standards that those who grew up in violence struggled with because of the normalisation of violence in their lives, and the equating love with getting beaten. But for those wāhine who did not grow up with violence in their lives, the values, beliefs and practices that they grew up assisted them. Airini explained the steps that she took:

*Like going back to church and going back to the values and beliefs, because my upbringing was church. And good values and beliefs. Then when I look at his upbringing it was alcohol, violence and stuff like that. So, we came from two different worlds. But once I went back there, I made myself strong and I changed my habits. So, I stopped drinking, I stopped doing those things, and I just started changing my lifestyle. I think having a role model of something different. I'm not saying it happened over night because it's a very long process. And sometimes you wouldn't recommend that people stay but, you know where we are now, I'm sort of glad we did because we're in a good space. And I think it's all part of growing up too, maturity in relationships and stuff. But then sometimes I see old people and they're still stuck in you know it's maturity in a relationship is different to age.*

## CONCLUSION

The wāhine in this research were unable to rely on others for support and help. Driven by their fears of their tamariki being taken and the consequences of seeking assistance outside their homes, wāhine undertook strategies to keep them and their tamariki safe. They were motivated by protecting their tamariki and others such as whānau, friends and neighbours. The suite of strategies they used included being smart, using themselves as distractors, being prepared, and using compliance, silence and mediation to keep safe. In some cases, wāhine were forced to use violence themselves to protect their tamariki and themselves.

*Being Safe* also required them to prevent violence where possible, which they did by knowing the triggers, being strong and downplaying the violence. Nevertheless, the strategies they used were not always successful and as the violence increased in frequency, intensity and severity they came to realise that their relationship was deteriorating. It was at this stage that they needed to draw on their inner strength and ask others for help. It was at this time that they felt vulnerable



# FINDINGS – TĀNE MĀORI

## Titiro whakamuri, kokiri whakamana

Look back and reflect so  
you can move forward

As we analysed the wāhine interviews, it became evident that we needed to also understand the perspective of tāne Māori who had previously used violence. Transforming thinking and doing involves addressing and restoring the balance between the complementary roles wāhine and tāne held prior to colonisation. The roles tāne had precolonisation within whānau as provider, protector and nurturer were disenfranchised – a spiritual and cultural loss and diminishment of their mana. Within the context of wāhine articulating often that they wanted the violence to cease, we needed to understand tāne perspectives of the concepts of love, vulnerability, safety, and protection because the wāhine understanding appeared different than western understandings of these concepts.

In this chapter, we present the key themes arising from these interviews: *Growing with Violence*, *Hurting her Wairua*, and *Breaking the Mindset*. These findings provide unique insights into some tāne use of violence – in providing their pūrākau, they made no excuses for their violence and the harm they caused. These interviews provide information on how they came to use violence and highlight signposts for where interventions are needed. Importantly, they highlighted that in changing conversations about Māori and the violence occurring within their whānau we must also include tāne as part of transforming the thinking and doing – we cannot have mana wāhine without mana tāne, essential for mana whānau.

## OVERVIEW OF TĀNE

We interviewed eight tāne, seven tāne who had all used violence against a current or past partner, and who were currently violence-free. All these men had addressed violence, drug and alcohol issues. We also interviewed one tāne who grew up without violence but who facilitated a kaupapa Māori programme to support tāne to become violence-free.

The tāne reflected on their lives and the violence they had used within their relationships. Ihaia highlighted the importance of showing boys and young men how essential they are, something that was not always present in the lives of tāne in this research:

*It is important that our boys, young men are aware of how special they are. Let them know that they are loved. Let them know that life is going to throw you a lot of ups and downs, and a lot of curveballs, but you are able to get through that stuff.*

## GROWING UP WITH VIOLENCE

*Growing Up with Violence* led the tāne to falsely believe that violence against wāhine was the “Māori way.” Such beliefs were reinforced by *Once Were Warriors*-type portrayals of Māori men, their experiences growing up, and the absence of positive tāne role models in their lives who showed empathy and compassion. These beliefs were fuelled by the fears, insecurities and failures present in their lives. In response to these influences, these tāne often adopted images of “macho guys” – such as, the pig-hunting, pub-going image of what it was to be a man – strong, hard and entrenched. Not receiving love or hearing “I love you” while growing up further reinforced the need for hard macho images. Wiremu shared how his upbringing was focused on being a strong male who kept his emotions on the inside.

*We live in a society where it's frowned upon if you start to cry if you're a male. You know my father brought me up like that. He was a very strong man. I never once saw him cry. I knew he was hurting inside a lot, but he never expressed his emotions very well. So, I think a lot of the problem is that we live in an expected world where we have to be strong. We have to show this façade to the world you know.*

Not all the Māori men grew up in homes with violence present, and these men commented on the powerful influence roles such as their fathers and other men had in their lives. Those role models who used violence, established it as an acceptable way of interacting with others, especially within the context of the role and place of wāhine. Where violence was present for these tāne growing up, their understanding of what was ‘normal’ and acceptable resulted in a tolerance for disrespect toward their sisters, mothers and aunties. The absence of alternative role models left them to work out by themselves what being the “man of the house” meant. Importantly, it shaped the way these men viewed wāhine and how they should be treated. Moreover, it distorted their notions of what constituted “love” and acceptable behaviours in relationships, as Nikau explained:

*Violence amongst our Māori men, we've been brought up with it by our whānau unfortunately. My dad, my brothers, as a young man I saw all that. So, everything's kei te pai (good). And that was part of my life. That's how I knew this is how we were. Bash my sisters around. Back-talk my mum. Aunties whatever.*

Although Ihaia talked about how not having the love of two or any parents was life-altering for tāne:

*Everybody had a family structure where mum and dad were both present. They had a presence about them. It was actually mind blowing. [tāne asked Ihaia] “What you didn't experience this?” “You didn't have a parent?” “You didn't have a mother that loved you?” “You didn't have a father that was there?” I learned that a lot of people have experienced trauma that has absolutely shifted them from their natural course in life.”*

Role models providing instructions for young tāne growing up was considered important according to the tāne. These instructions were transmitted either directly or indirectly through observations of their actions, and the language about the role and place of wāhine. They learnt that being disrespectful to wāhine was okay. Without question, macho male role models and prevailing forms of masculinity significantly impacted the knowledge and behaviours of tāne while growing up. Manaia talked about growing up in a violent home:

*I was also brought up in a violent household, grew up with a lot of violence. And for me what I saw was that the perpetrator of the violence, who wasn't my real father, lacked a role model in his life so he didn't know how to be a father, how to be a husband, how to be any of those things. He took it upon himself, you know to figure out the role, and which meant he was the leader. So, everyone else listened. If you didn't listen well [you] better look out. His father was in the war also, so his father wasn't there pretty much. And when he came home, he was damaged. And, so there's that intergenerational thing again. It got passed down to me. I was violent myself. And that was just behaviour that I was mimicking that was role modelled to me, and I thought that was how you did things. I have since learned otherwise! I think the two biggest things were that and the alcohol. Alcohol was always part of the deal.*

Matiu also provided insights into how his father gave more attention to his other siblings leading to feeling unwanted and his use of violence and drinking in adulthood.

*I was the middle son, so there were three boys I was in the middle and I was also the middle child [of 11 tamariki]. I felt so neglected, I felt so unwanted you know. And my dad used to, you know like he was trying. I don't know whether he really did try but he gave more attention to my older brother and my younger brother [you] know and I felt like I was, just unwanted and that he didn't care about me. One other time he told me to, excuse the language, but f\*\*\* off in the park, in front of my brothers and sisters. And that hurt, that cut deep and I became angry after that. And now that extended into my relationship where I didn't think I was going to turn [into a] violent man. But as soon as I started getting angry, I started hitting [partner], you know the mother to my kids. I don't know whether that stemmed from, whether it was from being angry, from being dis-wanted, unwanted, feeling like I was, you know, rejected from the family. So, I became an alcoholic.*

On the other hand, Rawiri shared how having negative role models in his life prompted him to look for alternative non-violent ways.

*My father was quite violent too. But I always sort of put it down to the fact that when his father died when he was very young. And when he was about 10 or 11 [years old], he was patted on the shoulder by one of his uncles, so the story tells. 'Well you've got to be the man of the house now.' ... I don't think my old man learned much about, how can I say it? You know, how to be a good father. Like in his eyes he was a good father, but his eyes were strict you know. You'd get a hiding and all that and my mother had to take a lot of it. But that was his world, and no one challenged that. So, he thought he was being the man you know. Whereas I learned the opposite. I thought well that's not what I want to be. So, he taught me, and he taught me in a negative way.*

## BEING ABUSED BY “RESPECTED” PEOPLE

While not all tāne grew up with violence present in their whānau, three had been exposed to some form of sexual violence in their early years. Their sexual violence experiences served as a precursor for their violence. These tāne all talked about being sexually abused and having some form of childhood trauma as young people. Such trauma negatively affected their wairua and wellbeing. Any influence positive role models may have had in their lives up to such events was diminished by sexual abuse, as Irirangi described:

*The sexual abuse experiences I had as a young boy, as a young teenager, that really ballsed me up in my head, changed my thinking about kaumatua.*

Irirangi talked about questioning who was safe and the need for congruence between role models' words and their actions:

*In my head I have a map of a kaumatua, who should be someone who's safe, who's someone who's consistent, someone who you know you can receive wisdom from their experience. When people start identifying safe tāne Māori, well one of the first things I look at is the congruence between what they say and what they do.*

Tāne who talked about how the trauma of sexual abuse as a child or young person manifested as deep-seated anger that consumed their way of being. It was an anger they did not recognise or understand and were unable to connect it to the trauma they had experienced until later in their lives. This trauma and deep-seated anger created a deep soul wound, damaging their wairua, and increasing their use of violence and having unhealthy relationships. Trauma and anger impacted their mental wellbeing, oftentimes, leading to the tāne self-medicating with violence, drugs and alcohol.

Most of the tāne talked about being physically, psychologically and sexually abused by whānau members, included 'respected' high-profile people in their whānau, hapū and communities. Abuse by these people contradicted the beliefs the tāne held about what these people should be, particularly within the context of abuse of power. The tāne reported “stories” existing within their whānau, hapū and communities but that silence and secrecy (although often a well-known secret) enabled the continued abuse by respected people. Nikau raised questions about the safety of some respected people.

*This is where my problem is. There's some good kaumatua that are doing their job. And there's some kaumatua out there, just as bad as I am. But they don't talk about it. I'd like to just see if you can give me an idea on that because it's quite an important thing.*

Irirangi was also clear about what attributes a kaumatua possessed:

*And when people say to me, "Oh that's your kaumatua," I say, "Well actually no." In my head I have a map of a kaumatua who's someone who should be safe, who's someone who's consistent, who's someone who you can receive wisdom from their experiences and that cut out a few of my [relatives].*

However, Rawiri talked about the importance of the process of muru to restore the wrong by having the person's privilege and status of representing their hapū revoked:

*I know some pretty high kaumatua, recognised as rangatira destroying young people's lives through molestation things like that. I know of one that's been to prison because of it, come out and still have that respect as a kaumatua. And another instance over in [lwi] over in [region]. One of their kaumatua, who was the stalwart of the marae, they found out that he was a paedophile. So, the people of that area shut him down. All his mana was taken from him, he was never allowed to represent that hapū again. Is never allowed to stand on the hapū marae ever again. And it destroyed his status. So, interventions like that, even though it's quite severe, need to happen.*

The silence and secrecy became contributing factors to the tāne in this research perpetuating the violence. Moreover, secrets were kept within whānau and not talked about. The tāne reported it was not safe to disclose their abuse, and unwillingly became complicit in the silence, the ongoing abuse, and its perpetuation of violence. These tāne maintained addressing abuse by 'respected' people was made more difficult because of a prevailing belief that Māori affected by abuse were not believed by those who could help. Tāne, like Manaia, talked about learning in early life that the Police would not do anything, reinforcing that there is little point in trying to elicit Police support.

*I remember when I was a child and my mum was bloodied on the floor and that we rung the Police, and the Police were, they did nothing. And it was just a domestic. So from then on we realised that there was no point trying to tell anyone because nothing was going to be done. You know what I mean. it became part of a routine really.*

The sexual abuse tāne experienced in their early life became a source of deep-seated anger and violence and raised questions for them about who were safe tāne in their communities. For the most part, respected people who abuse were untouchable, no one seemingly able to stop the abuse, unless there was a collective hapū or community approach. The tāne were clear that this problem needed to be sorted by those hapū and iwi where it exists, and action taken to restore the mana of those affected.

## WHAKAMANA (EMPOWERING) THE DYSFUNCTION

Intergenerational violence and harm, masculinity, vulnerability and fragility all play a part in empowering the dysfunction that dominates the lives of tāne, as Wiremu shared:

*We [men] whakamana the dysfunction. We make it [the violence] the tuakana (elder) within our environment until eventually it overtakes everything. You put it before everyone else.*

The tāne did not understand the role their childhood trauma, sexual abuse and the ensuing anger played in their use of violence, rather it was hidden and deep-seated. For the tāne, violence was more than conventional notions of power and control commonly associated with partner violence. Instead, the violence in their lives was a response to the abuse they had endured as a child or young person within the contexts of cultural disconnection, identity issues, social marginalisation and often intergenerational harm. Trauma and anger festered over time, creating a soul wound that lacked visibility, but put them at further risk in relationships and compromised their mental wellbeing. Vulnerability, fragility, stress and the absence of social constraints for these men enabled their use of alcohol and drugs and was compounded by having limited strategies and tools to respond differently.



## VULNERABILITY AND FRAGILITY

While the tāne described putting on tough macho images to the world, they also talked about being vulnerable and fragile. Vulnerability and fragility were seen to be precursors to their use of violence, stemming from multiple sources such as lacking control over what happened in their lives; having unfamiliar feelings and emotions and being unable to express these; fear about what would happen next; and lacking resilience. Vulnerability was reflective of long-term anger, trauma and having soul wounds that filtered into the tāne relationships with their partners. The outcome is that they did not know how to manage their anger and talked about responding to their inner turmoil in detrimental ways that further impacted their wellbeing. Instead they believed they needed to “harden up,” “deal with it,” “get over it,” and importantly not cry. In some cases, these tāne had suicidal thoughts. Matiu talked about contemplating overdosing:

*I used drugs to suppress all those feelings that was really going on in my childhood, that was really going on in my life, break ups and everything else, deaths. You know because I ended up losing my daughter in a car accident. But I dragged her through, you know she ended up on meth and everything. That deeply hurt me, and I fell into the dark soul of my career. I didn't think I was going to come out of it. I was ready to hot shot, well kill myself, you know have an overdose of drugs. But then I thought, “Gees – you’ve got another four kids there [Matiu], you’ve got all these mokos.”*

Showing and talking about emotion equated to being weak. This was a space that tāne did not want to feel comfortable to “sit in” until they decided to turn their lives around.

## BEING UNDER STRESS

The tāne talked about them and their whānau being under stress. Stress stemmed from being unable to feed their tamariki, maintaining jobs, and having no whānau support. Added to these sources of stress was the role drugs and alcohol had to play in their lives. Moreover, for some tāne knowing that their tamariki had observed the aftermath of them beating their mother, and the effects this had on them brought about feelings of remorse. Wiremu discussed the impacts of stress and highlighted the need for support, a “simple idea” but something that was not assured.

*Because you see that a lot with a lot of these families where babies are getting murdered. You know the stress is there. Possibly the stress of the tamariki not being able to feed them, trying to maintain jobs and to support the family. If an outside kaumātua, kuia could just step in, and say “Oh I’ll take baby for a while, let you have a rest.” I’ve often thought about that you know. Simple idea.*

The tāne indicated that having available whānau support that involved everyone, including the support of elders such as kaumātua and kuia, were seemingly simple support strategies that would have helped lessen the stress they were under. Nonetheless, they also talked about not having supportive whānau or growing up in State care making this seemingly obvious support system unrealistic

## ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

Alcohol, drugs and violence simultaneously compounded and fuelled the dysfunction the tāne experienced. For some tāne, growing up amongst alcohol normalised its use. For others it enabled them to mask feeling vulnerable and fragile, suppressing unwanted feelings and emotions that they were unable to manage. Simply, alcohol and drugs facilitated tāne leaving their feelings and emotions behind by escaping the reality they were caught in – a reality they didn’t want. Vulnerability and unwanted feelings stemmed from various sources, such as their childhood experiences, relationship break-ups, and deaths of a child or important whānau member, all sources of soul wounds the men carried with them. Matiu explained how his “brokenness” threatened his relationship with his tamariki and mokopuna.

*I had that brokenness in my drug addiction that’s why I wanted to do something about it, I wasn’t going to lose my kids. I was going to lose that connection with my kids. I dragged them through 40 years of addiction. You know I dragged them through my jail lags. I dragged them, my youngest one through that abusive lifestyle, that domestic lifestyle that I had with their mother. I dragged them through everything and that’s why I’m saying today that I’m clean today and I worked on myself, put myself into rehab. You know I’m not trying to put myself up there, but this is the stuff I needed to do to make myself well. And I’ve got this beautiful connection with my kids and my mokos today.*

Tāne described their use of alcohol and drugs was a way of reducing their inhibitions while at the same time increasing their lack of caring about what they did. It provided an 'escape' from being present when they were violent, while simultaneously reducing their threshold for violence. The remorse they felt following the use of violence against their partners did little to curb its recurrence. The tāne talked about the paradox of causing significant harm to person they loved the most. Nikau talked about not understanding how he had hurt his most cherished person:

*One night with alcohol, drugs. You know she's only a little woman. I didn't know what happened until the next day. Looking for my wife I couldn't find her. She was in hospital braced up, like you hold a building. I promised her that day I'd never hurt her. Well I promised everybody that day. I'd never touch anybody again. And that, that's the thing with our Māori people, they need to be honest in everything they do. I mean hey, if you love your wife then why would you even touch her? If you're gonna not love her, and want to use her as a punching bag, well why?*

Some of the tāne described themselves in a variety of ways – from being an angry drunk to being psychotic and crazy as a result of taking drugs like methamphetamine or Meth. Meth was described as a "nasty" drug that caused sleep deprivation that in turn led to increasing agitation, paranoia, psychosis and being "crazy." Drug and alcohol addictions accompanied severe violence, although the men claimed these were not always present when they were violent.

## NO SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS

The *whakamana* of dysfunction was fuelled by a cocktail of being vulnerable, fragile and stressed, and the use of alcohol and drugs, and enabled to continue primarily because they had *no social constraints*. While some of the tāne talked about spending significant amounts of time in prison, the social constraints they referred to were at the levels of their whānau, mates and community. Ihaia talked about tāne needing to be questioned, even if this caused them discomfort.

*They just want someone to stop and ask them, "Would you like to be a part of this?" I think you know they think permission from others to allow them to come and be a part of [stopping violence]. They might not be comfortable within that space.*

*But they look for someone to just say. "Would you like to be a part of this."*

The violence these Māori men used on their partners occurred often behind closed doors – but not always. Despite where it occurred, for the most part, no one talked about what was going on within their whānau or mates' network. They claimed no-one "outside" their homes saw what was really happening. The tāne maintained this happens because oftentimes whānau, mates and neighbours looked the other way. This in turn minimised the seriousness of the violence they used. The absence of any form of social constraints from whānau, mates and their community provided these tāne with an escape route from having to be accountable for their use of violence against their partners and tamariki and allowed its continuance. The tāne were clear, looking back on their lives, there needed to be no more secrets.

## HURTING HER WAIRUA

Reflecting on their use of violence, tāne described their relationships beginning as ideal and perfect, absent of violence and abuse. It was this state that tāne held onto, but as violence, alcohol and drugs entered their relationships with their wahine this idealised notion of their relationship remained – that is, ideal and perfect. Their concepts of love differed, as Ihaia reflected on his conversations with tāne over the years he had been working with tāne Māori:

*Some of the conversations that I've held with some of these men, their idea of what love is sex. And I think that's how they look at this word love. Or that's their understanding of what love is. It's more of a physical thing. It's fun to be intimate with their partners.*

Despite their notions of love and holding onto this idealised relationship, the violence inflicted on their partners meant that the quality of their relationship was never the same as when they first got together. Through the process of their recovery, tāne were able to identify how they "hurt" their partners' wairua, which in turn, also harmed their whakapapa and tūpuna.

The tāne also talked about the times they did not understand why they hurt their partners, who they loved the most in the world. These times often followed beatings that inflicted significant physical harm on their partners.

*I just could not understand why it was that over a little argument, I was pulling my wahine out of the house by the hair with my taiaha [a long wooden weapon]. And I was thinking what am I doing? I just couldn't comprehend it. But then the question, "Why am I doing this with the person that I love?" So that started a journey for me but look how long it took.*

Even when they ceased using physical violence, some of the men indicated continuing their violence verbally. They ignored their cultural obligations as Māori men and the need to value wāhine as a spiritual being because they did not know or understand these. *Hurting her wairua* had three sub-themes: *distorted understandings of love, connections to tamariki and mokopuna, and not seeking help.*

## DISTORTED UNDERSTANDINGS OF LOVE

Despite the men talking about their seemingly idyllic relationships at the beginning, they reported having distorted understandings of love. By associating love with violence, some men indicated this contributed to their confusion and the harm they inflicted onto their partners. For these tāne, love was a foreign concept stemming from an absence or lack of parental displays of love and affection. Moreover, most men saw love being acts of physical and sexual intimacy, as Ihaia shared:

*We often talk about love within the group setting. If I draw on some of those experiences of some of the conversations that I've had with some of these men, actually their idea of what love is sex. And I think that's how they look at this word love. Or that's their understanding of what love is. It's more of a physical thing. It's fun to be intimate with their partners.*

Other men did not understand the word "love", as Ihaia explained, which they claimed was broad with many applications. Instead of intimate forms of love with their partners, the tāne indicated their notions of love were more aligned to their relationships with their tamariki, as Wiremu described:

*I look at manaakitanga because manaakitanga covers a broader spectrum; whereas love is, I truly don't understand that word love. I hear it so many times. I was brought up in a violent household, I'd get a hiding and then I'd be told that I was loved.*

*And so that's my, my reasoning around that word – it is somewhat confused. Because I was told I was loved all the time and that was happening to me.*

Ihaia said that for tāne, love was more likened to the love they held for their tamariki and highlighting how as a concept it was somewhat problematic. While, aroha is more appropriate within a Māori context Ihaia indicated that both love and aroha were unfamiliar concepts.

*Love is more easily talked about in relation to their tamariki and spending time with their tamariki, as opposed to the significant other. So, I think you know this whakaaro of love is, is quite [fraught]. I think you know even when we think about that in a context Maori, of aroha. Aroha to be aligned with another person's thinking and the sharing of breath, these concepts are so foreign to these men. Yet, we understand that there is an understanding, perhaps that they don't quite have an awareness of [love or aroha].*

Understanding the concept of love for, or how much they loved, their partner was not realised until it was too late for most of the men. By this stage, which may have been many years later, the tāne realised it was too late as their relationships were beyond salvaging. Nevertheless, their (ex)partners were invariably the mothers of their tamariki, and the whakapapa that connected them to the mother. Matiu was motivated to stop using drugs and address his use of violence in order re-establish this whakapapa connection:

*So, it's taken me almost nine years to get to where I am today you know. To get to this I'm just coming up 19 months now and it's all been through these resources I've been pulling out. But what I needed to do was go to rehab, work out what was going on with me and then I can have this connection back to my kids and to the mother of my kids. You know we get on okay today. But it wasn't until I stopped the drugs. That [connection to kids and their mother] wasn't going to happen until I did work on me, [un]til I did work on Matiu.*

Even when the tāne acquired an understanding about the sanctity and the role of wāhine it did not mitigate the trauma and hurt that they had inflicted on their partners.

## CONNECTION TO TAMARIKI AND MOKOPUNA

The Māori men talked about the importance of their tamariki and mokopuna, who linked them to their mothers. They also recognised the importance of their roles as fathers but tended to focus on their roles as being hunter-gatherers, rather than being nurturers of their tamariki and mokopuna and their relationship with a partner. Some of the tāne came to realise that pre-colonisation they were nurturers and carers of tamariki and mokopuna as Wiremu's research indicated:

*In terms of the violence, it's become endemic within the culture. When they were introducing the anti-smacking law, Māori were all over FaceBook saying we've always done it, that's the Māori way. And so, it's become that accepted. But my research showed me that it wasn't the Māori way. The father was as much the nurturer of the tamariki as the mother was. The early missionaries never once saw the father disciplining either the wife or the tamariki.*

In recognising Māori could be "awesome dads", it was noted that some tāne only maintained a public persona, only displaying this awesomeness in the public arena. Nonetheless, tāne who used violence within their whānau context often felt socially conditioned not to show emotion, preventing them from displaying affection towards their partners, tamariki and mokopuna. Ihaia explained how the love of tāne for their tamariki differed from the feelings they had for their partners:

*I think also within their thinking that's perhaps how they see their relationships with the mother of their tamariki. However, when we talk about love towards their tamariki, there was a different feel, there was a different energy, there was a shift in the way in which they talk about that with their tamariki. That could be identified as spending time with their tamariki, taking them off to the park, sitting down watching a movie, playing games. But when you look at that or we get them to transfer that thinking back towards their partners there is this block there that doesn't allow them to compute that actually, that there could be a representation of love or spend all that time with the mother of their tamariki, their partners.*

Reflecting on their past violence, tāne acknowledged their partners were the mothers of their tamariki, although at the time they did not recognise the role fathers had as protectors of their tamariki and mokopuna during their use of violence. Looking back, they came to realise that during these times wāhine put themselves in the way of harm or danger to protect their tamariki. At these times, Ihaia recognised the impact on wāhine not showing emotions to their tane.

*They [tāne] never ever heard their parents tell them as they were tamariki or growing up, even in their teenage years when they have become parents themselves, have never ever experienced their parents say those words [I love you] to them. Or experienced that in either a physical way or a showing of other emotions or feelings that could be attached to this notion of feeling loved. For a lot of them, they grow up with this idea that their parents never liked them. So, if their parents never liked them everybody else around them is not going to like them. And there is this feeling that starts to settle in very quickly that there is something wrong with them. And then they spend the rest of their lives trying to prove to people around them that "There's nothing wrong with me." And they take control of their situations in an inappropriate way, where they are using the violence, they are using the drugs, they're being abusive towards their tamariki. And, they sit there scratching their heads thinking why aren't they [wāhine and tamariki] telling me that they love me?*

Despite having emotional challenges, tāne feared losing their tamariki. Loss of connections with their tamariki caused them a lot of hurt and pain, forcing them into a deeper hole. Some described this pain causing a broken heart and wairua, and deep internal hurt for both the men and wāhine, as Matiu explained:

*So, a lot of it came for me through the drug addiction, hearing a lot of these stories and where it all stemmed from. A lot of it is like a broken heart, wairua you know, they've really got so much deep hurt inside them.*



Abusive relationships resulted in child protection services (Child Youth and Family or more recently Oranga Tamariki) becoming involved in their lives, often removing their tamariki from their care. For those tāne, it led to increases in their use of drugs and alcohol. Maintaining or re connecting with their tamariki and mokopuna was motivation to stop using violence.

## NOT SEEKING HELP

Tāne recognised their partners kept themselves safe from their violence by their abilities to read the cues that their tane might become violent. They did this by being aware of their partner's triggers, non-verbal communication and body gestures, and the presence of intimidating behaviours. Looking back, the tāne commented on not understanding why their wahine did not go to the Police, and instead stayed in their relationship, although noting that eventually they generally left. Matiu pondered on why his partner did not leave or report him to the Police, perplexed about why she did not do anything:

*Not once she wanted to go to the Police, you know where she could of done. You know she could of had me up for assault. But not once. That's a hard one for me to understand too. I don't know what you know what that's about, whether they just don't want to go and put their partner through it even though he's done this to them. I don't know that distorted thinking of love, you think, "Oh okay, he's bashed me, but I won't go to the Police because I still love him." I don't know. Hard one to get a grip on.*

While recognising their partners needed to get away because of their vulnerability to harm, these tāne recognised that often wāhine became isolated from necessary support systems, which they noted paradoxically also acted as protecting themselves and their tamariki measure. It was often feelings of shame, guilt and fear about their financial security, not having a home to go to, and their tamariki being reasons to stay. Moreover, tāne commented on wāhine stayed because they could see the potential they possessed. Tangaroa talked about the belief of his wahine in him:

*You know but her point, her response to that was that it was miniscule compared to all of the other things that were there in that space. It's just that there were some things that had triggered inside me that I hadn't sorted out [sexual abuse as a young person]. Wahine, they can see things inside their tane and of course the long term vision, but they also had to take into account the immediacy of safety for their children.*

## BREAKING THE MINDSET

The tāne in this research provided examples that they are capable of changing their use of violence even though some confessed to being exceedingly violent, as Irirangi who had spent significant time in prison emphasised:

*You know people can change. I think that's the biggest thing because often people say people can't change, and you know, I've seen situations inside our relationship, provided evidence that that's not so.*

The tāne talked about the violence they used as a mindset and stopping use of their violence required *Breaking the Mindset*. Some event or trigger motivated the tāne to shift their thinking that invariably led to their motivation to explore ways to stopping their use of violence. The endgame of *Breaking the Mindset* was understanding their use of violence and learning to become violence-free. But, as Matiu explained, having the right support was crucial for *Breaking the Mindset*.

*Well I think we've said most but how I feel about it [changing]. Support, support in the right places. Support from people that have been there, done that. You know you can have all the psychologists, your therapists that you want that have read everything in a book. But they get it more from a person who's been there. You know I would sit here. You're [men who are now violence-free] telling me your story. There's a lot of things that I can relate with, that we've lived the same lifestyle. And I'll be sitting here, and I'll be amazed by you, you know, I'll be captivated by you because you're telling my story and I'm telling your story.*

The process of *Breaking the Mindset* involves four properties that these tāne needed in their healing journey: *reviewing notions of masculinity, dealing with the inner child, and imagining being a safe tane.*

## REVIEWING THE NOTIONS OF MASCULINITY

*Reviewing notions of masculinity* was crucial for these tāne *Breaking the Mindset*. The tāne talked about being aware of societal expectations of being a man being enmeshed within notions of machoism. They demonstrated having a strong and exaggerated sense of masculinity by being strong and not engaging in any behaviours perceived to be weak, like crying. Connecting with mātauranga and te ao Māori equipped these tāne to begin questioning the dominant notions of ‘being a man and tane Māori’ and was essential to questioning the notions of machoism they held.

Importantly, connecting with mātauranga and pūrākau enabled them to recognise that tāne were nurturers prior to the colonisation of Aotearoa. This information provided tāne with an indication of how their behaviour needed to change in order to function on the same level as their partners. Ihaia explained how social conditioning about masculinity marginalises their full involvement in their whānau life:

*And I think a lot of the times men do want to be a part of that [the birth of their tamariki or the rearing of their daughters]. But there’s a social conditioning that says men don’t want to show too much emotions, or that’s not their role. You know social conditioning says if you’re a male you should be out being the hunter gatherer, providing for your family. What I know, and once again drawing on what I’ve learned from the men over the 11 years I’ve been working in the DV [domestic violence] field, is actually they just want someone to stop and ask them, “Would you like to be a part of this?” So, I think they think permission from others to allow them to come and be a part of [parts of life not generally considered by these men to be masculine]. They might not be comfortable within that space. But they look for someone to just say, “Would you like to be a part of [this]?”*

Sometimes their sense of masculinity shaped the ways in which they handled confronting or challenging situations, which were described as ‘dramatic’ and not healthy. Manaia explained this within the context of how tāne handled rejection:

*We don’t handle rejection and grief very well. And so, those are usually precursors to some kind of violence, I think. Especially rejection with men. That even goes for mental illness or suicidal thinking. If people knew how to handle rejection properly, you could be killing two birds with one stone kind of thing. If we’re taught how to, how to handle rejection without getting angry, without you know, wanting to kill ourselves, you know, without doing something stupid.*

Given that these tāne were socially conditioned not to talk about or share their emotions or what was on top for them, ‘broship’ created a safe space for them to examine their views of masculinity and their use of violence. Irirangi noted that tāne tend to connect with each other, often through sports clubs and other groups such as gangs. Tangaroa highlighted how being with other tāne created a safe space for sharing and talking:

*It’s a human tendency that’s accelerated in Maori culture by having connection with other tāne. And then you have your extended whanau hui and things like this with your community, and your haka, your sports clubs and things like that. I get the concept of criminal behaviour inside gangs. I think that there’s always going to be those elements. But, then there’s also elements of building and maintaining status quo in other gangs, in other groups of people. I still think that they could use their processes a bit better to support their members so that the abuse of wahine doesn’t continue to mokopuna.*

Manaia shared how coming together with other tāne was a place to freely talk about those things he would not normally talk about:

*Yeah it is a façade [hard macho image], because even just the other day I heard one of the boys on the programme saying, “I don’t talk about these things, outside of here.” So, we provide a forum*

*for them to be able to speak openly about things they normally wouldn't want to talk to other guys about because of their wanting to look macho and all that.*

Nikau maintained finding trust within and the need to talk with one another, and being able to contribute to discussions with other younger tāne:

*You find trust within each other. You know they're more open, you know I've met guys here and I'm not even a teacher! I'm not even a teacher and, and they're talking to me. You know. And I could walk away from that. You know. But I'm not going to walk away because these young men need me to talk with them as far as I'm concerned.*

It is within this broship space that mentors for other tāne were created – tāne who understand and who know what they are facing and doing, as Wiremu explains:

*Spaces, such as those created through broship, remove restrictions on where tāne Māori can trust others, think, feel and talk. It is amongst the bros that tāne learn to open up and discuss violence and share their whakaaro about this kaupapa. Having this space is key to tāne being able to talk with those who know and have lived similarities, and who hear their stories – broship offers the space and the forum that enables conversations. Importantly, broship forms a network of safety whereby the 'bros' can prevent their mates from beating their partners.*

The tāne who became mentors were seen to be powerful, relatable and able to share their experiences, thoughts and wisdom. Moreover, broship meant that these tāne felt they needed to hide things – instead, they were able to share their thoughts and feelings held inside oftentimes for many years, freeing them. Nikau stated:

*I'm here with these brothers of mine. I call them my brothers because this is where I learned everything to open me up to this kōrero [violence].*

## DEALING WITH THE INNER CHILD

Part of reviewing notions of masculinity involved dealing with the inner child. Tāne abused as tamariki or young people, talked about a deep-seated anger they did not understand but which drove their violence. *Dealing with the inner child* required tāne to recognise this anger as a driver of their violence along with its cause, that is, their abuse as a child or young person. For these tāne, embarking on the journey of *dealing with the inner child* required them having permission to show their emotions that they had stored up for many years. Ideally, receiving an apology for what happened assisted in their healing journey, although this was not always possible. To assist the tāne to deal with their childhood abuse, they needed to know the available options for help, although they noted that there was either little or no options.

*Dealing with the inner child* also involved the tāne acknowledging the role of growing up in a whānau or an environment where violence existed. Matiu talked about how a positive role model guided him through life:

*I had no guidance when I turned to him. My father didn't guide me through life. I winged my life, I winged it every day. Even when I was in prison, he didn't come to see me once. In my first prison lag, I was just thinking, "Dad come and see me. Come and guide me. Come and see me." I was sitting in my cell a broken, little boy. Just broken wanting to see his dad and he never came. He never came to any of my rugby games, he never ever told me he loved me. And that's the stuff that can hurt. That's the stuff that you had to go through, push through. And that's why I became a drug dealer and ended up rebelling on his name. I became a safe cracker. I became everything to do with drugs. I became worse than everybody else.*

Male role models (who were tāne Māori) transmitted acceptable patterns for behaviours for treating the wāhine in their lives and at the same time legitimated the use of violence in their homes, even though all the tāne talked about their partners being important in their lives. For these tāne to change their established patterns of behaviours and ways of being, they needed new ways of doing things. Two mechanisms were identified: *imagining being a safe tane* and *needing new ways of doing things*.

(Re)establishing the positive roles tāne have in their whānau was key to *imagining being a safe tane*, as Ihaia indicated:

*They have to find a way to ensure men understand the importance of their role within whanau. Understand the importance of their role as dads, as brothers, as sons and nephews, as mokopuna. That there is a place for them in their whanau. And that they are important to their whanau. If those conversations do take place, then we will see a shift possibly back to what we know our tupuna had. And I think that would enable whanau wellbeing to thrive. It will enable whanau to move towards or to live comfortably and to live in positive spaces.*

An event or trigger motivated shifts in how tane viewed their roles within their whānau, their use of violence and the damage they inflicted. This then led to a decision to work towards stopping their use of violence, such as having a child observe the aftermath of their violent outburst. These decisions were empowering, although at the same time they were also confronting, given oftentimes long histories of growing amidst and using violence. Understanding culturally-based roles of wāhine and tane was important in their process of change according to Ihaia:

*When they start to get some understanding around some of the more traditional roles and there was this whakaaro of wāhine and tane worked together, not men were outside around the barbeque talking about lads stuff and drinking on beers while the wāhine were busy running around prepping the 10,000 other jobs that go on with whanau barbeques and gatherings. You know they start to see a very different way of thinking.*

Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, not all the tane we interviewed grew up with violence in their homes. For those men, they needed to come to understand the source of their deep-seated anger. *Imagining being a safe tane*, also involved having to address any alcohol and drug misuse and other issues, such as childhood pain. Addressing these issues meant also having to admit to and own these personal struggles – they needed to work on what was hurting inside of them. Furthermore, the men identified that their partners also had work to undertake, such as understanding why they were attracted to “bad boys.” For instance, this process involved owning their own alcohol and drug misuse and childhood sexual abuse. Wiremu claimed facing his use of violence and addiction was an important part of addressing his past trauma:

*For me, it took me owning up to myself that I was this terrible person. Then I had to go out and find help. So, I found help for my violent side, but I still struggled with addictions. And that's where this programme [kaupapa Māori programme], I'm a product of this programme as well. I came through the programme and just learning about the tane – how to behave as a proper tane. Role modelling the ātua, allowed me to behave more properly. And, realise my role as a Māori man to the people that I consider my loved ones. So that it [learning about ātua and tane Māori] was a big help for me. I still get angry, but now I have tools to help me not behave [in angry ways], take the intensity out of anger. A lot of it comes down to the spiritual side, karakia and doing things like that.*

A key aspect of *imagining being a safe tane* is connecting with te ao Māori. Te Ao Māori became an inspiration for change. The tane talked about how learning about aspects of te ao Māori, such as tūpuna, wāhine toa, te whare tangata through pūrākāu and pepeha provoked them to examine their relationship with wāhine and to change their thinking as they became enlightened. Mātauranga and ancient Māori culture provided them with examples of balance between wāhine and tane in relationships, and the importance of wāhine for the whakapapa and harmonious whānau and hapū. Wiremu described how this mātauranga influenced how he understood obligations of tane to their partners:

*It was about retelling of the ancient stories. Today we focused on ātua tane, where are the ātua wāhine? Now I'm going through trying to rediscover who these wāhine [Hineteiwaiwa and Niwareka] were. I always thought that Tangaroa ruled the ocean, everything. But actually, his wife Hinemoana is the mother of all fish. Once we get back to understanding that mindset of how to respect the female essence within the relationship, then I think that we can start to slowly stop some of the harm that's happening out there and making our men realise that there's an obligation to that woman's tapu, her mana, her whakapapa that needs to be followed through. And that's how it was done traditionally, you were chosen to be with each other, the toanga.*



Learning about ātua, the mana and roles of tāne and wāhine and the importance of balance were key to the men reviewing their concepts of masculinity. Learning ancient stories signalled the importance of the restoration of balance, and the crucial role of respectful relationships with wāhine. This connection with te ao Māori, cultural values, beliefs and practices strengthened their identity as Māori men and in the process, helped create a sense of pride in who they were. Through this process they came to realise that respect for others needed to be earned. Moreover, it gave them an opportunity to establish tikanga for their homes, although for some of the men this change came too late for their relationship with their woman that they 'loved.' Most of all, these changes promoted positive relationships with their tamariki and young persons in most instances. Ihaia explained the role of becoming culturally connected for these men.

*Going to marae here and interacting you see dads interacting with their tamariki and taking those roles on, changing the nappies, feeding the child. Just being around the child on the marae, you know, it's great to see that. Now for some of these circles of people that is mahi that they do off the marae also. It isn't just limited to that space [the marae].*

Needing new ways of doing things involved facing their abusive and violent behaviours and understanding how this influenced their thinking, feeling, fear and behaviours – it was the beginning of embarking on their healing journey. The tāne needed to become aware that being aggressive and violent does not work, especially in relation to the people they had hurt the most yet who were most important – their partner and tamariki. Often the only tool the tāne felt they had in their 'kete' (basket) was their fist and their ability to be violent. They talked about needing new ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. This meant learning how to be non-violent, because as Irirangi shared, his only tool for responding was violence.

*I'm sad about when I think about conflict and people getting into strife. Often if you have trauma, for me, someone's mana has been trampled on and someone's tapu has been violated. And that's probably why it took me awhile [to understand source of anger and violence], because my tapu had been violated as a tane. And the only way I knew to respond to trauma [and] things like that was to be*

*violent. Then I met a beautiful woman and it was all sweet until we had trauma or had difficulty, and the only thing I thought of at that time well was use your fists. You know you just deal with it physically.*

Through a process of gradual enlightenment, the men recognised that to establish change in their whānau, they needed to go the extra mile and learn new ways of doing things. That is, they needed to put tools in their 'kete' to assist them in challenging times. This sometimes meant they needed to associate with tāne who were in the same waka.

However, the learning of new ways of doing things was reliant on credible people with whom they could relate. Invariably these people were other tāne who had lived their realities and who no longer used violence within their whānau. The tāne reported that these inspirational role models needed to be motivational and able to deliver messages in not only professional but also gentle and loving ways – this was crucial to changing their unsafe thinking, feeling and behaviours. Most importantly, the messages and the information they delivered needed to be relevant and meaningful, as Rawiri stressed:

*I see people like [the bros] as motivational speakers. One of the guys you always hear in New Zealand I think his name, [well-known mountain climber], that fella that lost his feet. Me personally, I get a bit tired hearing about him because I think, he lost all his fingers and he was rescued. Then he went back up the mountain and lost more fingers, and I'm thinking, "He's probably paid a lot. Okay he's being motivational, but." I see what's here are real motivational speakers, because, yes he [mountain climber] was already motivated to do good things and all the rest of it, and people want to pay probably a lot of money to hear him speak." But to me it's like, really? You'd do that again? Fuck! These fellas you know if they're in a pool of knowledge with [the Māori men] sitting in here. Well you've got a motivational speaker, you've got your environment, you've got your listening audience. That to me is where change is really paramount. It's about being a motivational speaker in a sense, and that correct environment. We get the men in there speaking about violence it's the same as the pool of knowledge. I think they're the important things to change that macho image*

*that's really out there. Like we will be able to do our bit – that the intergenerational change that's going to happen down the track you know.*

Matiu also talked about the importance of having access to tāne who had lived their realities, who knew their challenges, and who understood the change that they needed to make – these tāne were credible and what they had to say relevant and meaningful:

*Support from people that have been there, done that. You know you can have all the psychologists, your therapists that you want that have read everything in a book. But they [Māori men] get it more from a person who's been there [lived a similar reality]. You know I would sit here [and think] you're telling me your story that there's a lot of things that I can relate, we've lived the same lifestyle. And I'll be sitting here, and I'll be amazed by you. I'll be captivated by you because you're telling my story and I'm telling your story. So, I just think resources like that, I don't know for our wahine I think that's important too, to deal with that inner child stuff. You know that stuff that you know brings us into these abusive relationships.*

The restoration of the mana of tāne emerged as a crucial healing component – but as Ihaia rightly pointed out, finding new ways is needed so tāne fully understand their importance and roles within their whānau.

*These tāne talked about needing to find a way to ensure that men understand the importance of their role within whanau. Understand the importance of their role as dads, as brothers, as sons and nephews, as mokopuna. That there is a place for them in their whānau. And that they are important to their whānau. I think if there is, if those conversations do take place, then we will see a shift possibly back to, what we know our tupuna had. And I think that enable whānau, wellbeing to thrive. It will enable, whanau to move towards, to live comfortably and to live in positive spaces. To encourage growth and development across all levels. It's an important role raising tamariki. It's an even more important role raising young men.*

## CONCLUSION

The tāne in this research possessed distorted concepts of power and control that were mana diminishing for all concerned: themselves as tāne, their wāhine and their tamariki and mokopuna. This in turn brought about other misconceptions relating to love versus aroha, for instance. In their pūrākau, tāne described exploiting the vulnerability of their wahine and tamariki rather than seeing this as a state to be protected. The distorted reconstruction of tāne through colonisation and Western ideas of power and gender imbalances brought about a dissonance that rendered tāne powerless and marginalised (through the losses of land, cultural practices and te reo through widespread death caused by disease and war), and the subsequent loss of cultural values and tikanga along with the necessary supports inherent in pre-colonisation whānau and hapū rendered tāne adopting colonisers violence to women and children as a property right.

The tāne highlighted the potential they have to become non-violent and work through various issues they may have to realise this goal. The seven tāne all talked about using extreme forms of violence, with some associating in some way to gangs and spending time in prison. They all acknowledged their use of violence, drugs and crime, in some cases. Despite their backgrounds and their appearances, they all had 'warm' ngākau (heart). However, each talked about the importance of truly understanding their roles as tāne Māori. The restoration of the mana of tāne emerged as a crucial healing component – having their misconceptions about what it is to be a man, and more importantly, tāne Māori was greatly influenced by colonial concepts of being a "man" in society. All of these tāne are now supporting other tāne (especially young tāne) to be come violence-free and to learn about the importance of culture. Their pūrākau has highlighted the importance of 'culture as cure'.

# TRANSFORMING THINKING AND DOING – KEY MESSAGES

**Kua rere te manu**

**Kua ngā rangi o te ao e rere ana**

The bird has flown its nest –  
it is free to fly the skies of the world

New directions, initiatives and horizons

*E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau* brings to the forefront wāhine and tāne voices about family violence. In doing so, wāhine and tāne signal the need to strengthen systemic responses and those working with Māori in the family violence and sexual violence arena. The findings highlight the need for new ‘restoration’ narratives for wāhine, tāne and tamariki that better reflect the multi-layered complexities wāhine living with violence navigate, all the while recognising the various ways in which wāhine are marginalised and excluded from accessing help. Ways that are unique to them as Indigenous women. Importantly, the system and services generally need to re-focus on creating safe places and spaces that are genuinely welcoming and that have safe people who are willing to be non-judgmental, compassionate and empathetic.

The findings of *E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau* demonstrate the precarity for wāhine living with a partner who uses violence and the role systemic entrapment plays in narrowing the realistic options they have available. *E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau* also reinforces the need to strengthen and develop our whānau (extended family networks), hapū (constellations of whānau) and hapori (communities). Those born into violence need support to find new ways of interacting and parenting that does not include violence – those with experiences of child and sexual abuse as young people need support and healing for their trauma.

The key findings of *E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau* will be discussed in this chapter, particularly within the context of the key messages necessary for transforming knowing and doing regarding violence occurring within whānau Māori. These key findings are systemic entrapment; context counts – understanding wāhine and tāne; keeping safe is relative; and culture as cure. Using the theory for change outlined in Chapter 2, in this chapter we discuss the need to restore the balance within our whānau and the systemic changes that are needed to change the current ‘restoration’ narrative to one that is inclusive of how wāhine keep safe and protect their tamariki in unsafe relationships.

## SYSTEMIC ENTRAPMENT

The concept of entrapment adds to the complexity that wāhine are forced to navigate and negotiate and needs to be understood as a significant barrier to their help-seeking (Figure 7.1). Entrapment of women is nothing new to the field of intimate partner violence and is the outcome of coercive control by a partner (Stark, 2007; Thaller & Messing, 2016; Troop & Hiskey, 2013). Stark (2007) proposed coercive control as a mechanism to entrap partners – i.e. what men do to women to prevent them leaving them. He described a range of strategies abusers draw upon to intimidate, threaten, humiliate, isolate and generally demean their female partners through controlling various aspects of their lives (including finances), psychological put-downs, threatening their lives and those of their children and other important people in a woman's life, surveillance, stalking, and harassment, for example.

According to Stark, coercive control functions to oppress a partner supported by societal acceptance of gender-based entitlement, inequalities and inequities. Although, Troop and Hiskey (2013) point out social rather than mental or psychological defeat plays a role in the development of PTSD and women's entrapment. For, Māori however, the picture is also complicated by the effects of colonisation and the 'restructuring' of the protective roles and functions of whānau and hapū. Thus, systemic entrapment as it applies to whānau Māori must also be cognisant of ongoing colonisation, its effects, historical trauma, and the contemporary social and economic disenfranchisement of whānau, tāne, and wāhine. Entrapment also needs to consider the reasons why wāhine stay in unsafe relationships. We also found their aroha (compassion, empathy and love) and manaakitanga (deep caring) for their partner lead them to see their partner's potential and need for healing (Wilson et al., 2019). We suggest that the coercive control that tāne use is not driven by the need to dominate and oppress per se (although their actions lead to this), but by their sense of diminishing control over their lives (including through the misuse of alcohol and drugs), by deep-seated anger resulting from abuse as children and young people, and the absence of positive role models because of intergenerational effects of colonisation. Nevertheless, more research is needed to understand this more fully.

We would argue that the pūrākau of wāhine point to the family violence sexual violence system-based response as a significant player in their entrapment in

their relationships with a partner using violence that extends beyond institutional indifference. Tolmie et al. (2018) describe institutional indifference as one of three components of social entrapment. Hence, systemic entrapment lies within the role of government agencies and non-government organisations offering social and health services and their ineffective responsiveness to wāhine seeking assistance. This in turn leads to wāhine avoidance or reticence to proactively seek help, at often in times of crisis. Within this context, systemic entrapment comprises the following dimensions:

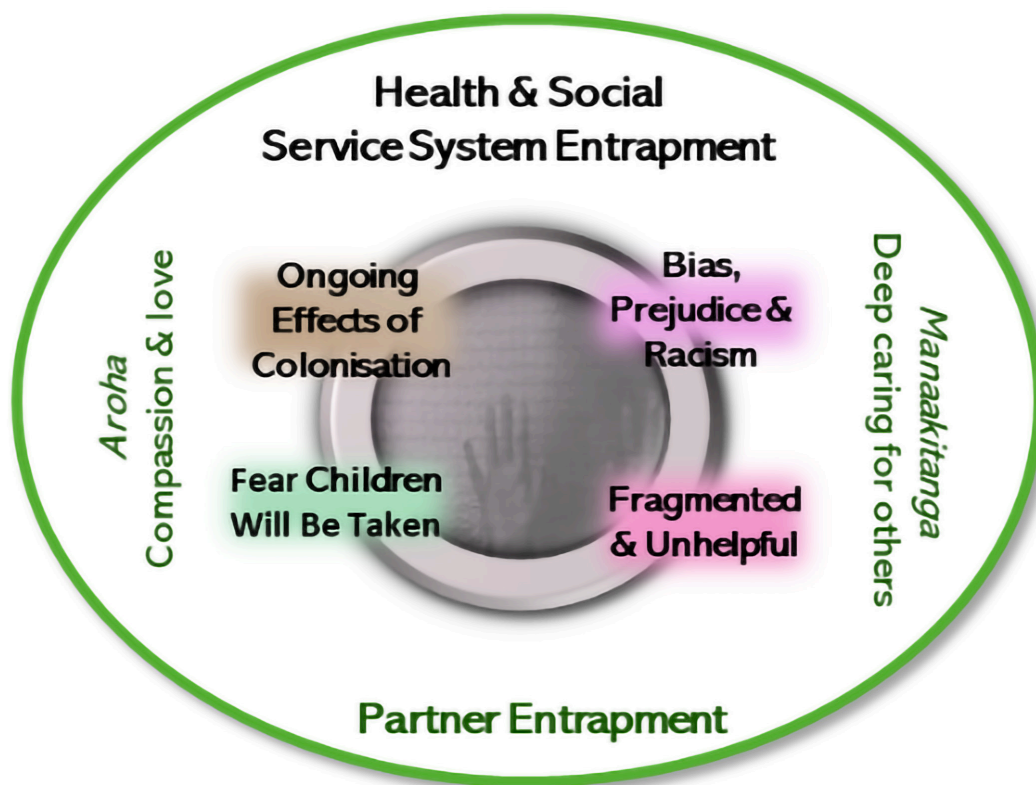
- Fear their tamariki will be removed for child protection concerns;
- Fear of encountering people who display prejudice, negative stereotyping and racist attitudes and behaviours that lead to disrespectful and ineffective responses and deficit framing;
- Encountering unhelpful and dismissive people who should be helping them; and
- Ineffective and unsuccessful access the support they need.

We found systemic entrapment of wāhine to be a significant barrier in making it difficult for them to leave. While Tolmie et al. (2018) extended the notion of the entrapment of women beyond that of partners, to include the social dimensions such as institutional indifference, framing in this way within social entrapment hides the significant role the family violence system plays in the entrapment of wāhine Māori. Therefore, it needs to be named and addressed, because simply continuing to 'blame' wāhine for their plight and their neglectful mothering is unacceptable. The social response wāhine receive when they approach services is a determiner of the outcome for them (Wilson & Webber, 2014b). Importantly, the system does little to identify their strengths and the courage they possess to keep themselves and their tamariki as safe amidst the adversity within and outside of their homes.

A key underlying premise of systemic entrapment is the use of deficit discourses as a way of framing and representing wāhine Māori. The narratives arising from deficit discourses are negative and shines the light on the shortcomings and failures of wāhine – they are seen to be part of a problem to be fixed, and the their strengths, capabilities and potential overlooked (Fogarty, Bulloch, McDonnell, & Davis, 2018). Deficit discourses are,



Figure 7.1 Health and social service system entrapment



*...disempowering patterns of thought, language and practice that represent people in terms of deficiencies and failures (The Lowitja Institute, 2018, p. 1).*

We found wāhine were frequently and repeatedly subjected to negative and disparaging judgments and conversations about them that questioned their capability and competence as mothers and productive members of society. The excessive focus on their deficits and social pathology led to the victim blaming of wāhine. This type of treatment encountered by wāhine has also been reported by others (Dhunna et al., 2018; Ware, Breheny, & Forster, 2017). For instance, being neglectful in the care of their tamariki. The ways in which wāhine are framed sets up a chain reaction for those interacting with them when they seek help, which is unhelpful, and at times, heightens the risk to the safety of wāhine and their tamariki (Wilson, Smith, et al., 2015). Moreover, because of past experiences the level of trust wāhine have in services and those who work within them is low. This lack of trust and confidence in agencies and

services leads to some wāhine engaging defensive attitudes, wanting to avoid being treated poorly. Undoubtedly, these factors were a significant barrier to them seeking help. Schnitzler (2019) states:

*The misrepresentation and underrepresentation of Indigenous women is deeply rooted in colonial ideals and will not be disassembled until our society adopts a decolonized mindset. ... Every woman who has been a victim of violence deserves to be heard and remembered in a meaningful way. They are worthy; they must be brought to the front page (p. 146).*

Despite the high level of risk for serious assault and homicide wāhine face, the poor level of system responsiveness they encounter when engaging with agencies and services is something that can no longer be tolerated and must urgently be addressed. It is useful to remember that wāhine have a higher prevalence of partner violence (Fanslow, Robinson, Crengle, & Perese, 2010), are more likely to be hospitalised for assault

(Ministry of Health, 2015), and three times more likely to be a victim of homicide (NZ Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2017). The implications of historical, sociocultural and contextual factors impacting their lives needs consideration when planning policy.

Furthermore, the generation of the fear of having their tamariki removed when needing to ask for help deterred wāhine from doing so. This fear is very real – the removal of tamariki from wāhine and whānau is nothing new in Aotearoa. All the wāhine in *E Tū Wāhine*, *E Tū Whānau* either had personal experience of having a child(ren) removed (some permanently) or knew someone whose tamariki had been removed and being totally disempowered and silenced through the process. Further, the pūrākau of wāhine and tāne also highlighted the devastating effects on them when their tamariki were taken into State care. This was a further burden and trauma, added to the load wāhine were also carrying and for those who tamariki had been removed. It created deep and wide soul wounds, and for those who talked about its long-term effects, the removal of tamariki damaged their mother-tamaiti relationships.

The fears of wāhine about having their tamariki removed are also grounded in the knowledge that tamariki Māori make up more than half (59%) of the children in the care of the Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children. A cohort study of children born in 1998 until they turned 18 years in 2015 found that Māori were more likely than children of other ethnicities to be notified and placed in out of home care, and that socioeconomic status was not a protective factor (Roulund et al., 2019). While we do not argue that some tamariki do need out of home care, there are many whose mothers and fathers needed support in parenting and providing safe and nurturing environments for their tamariki – especially when they have not had positive role models in their lives (Wilson, 2016). All the wāhine in this study placed protecting their tamariki as their priority – they should not need to fear asking for help but rather have access to a system that enables them to get the support they need.

When wāhine have the courage to seek help, they have already exhausted the strategies they have been using to keep them and their tamariki safe – when they ask, they need prompt and effective help. It is with little wonder that the majority of wāhine did not feel vulnerable until such time as they needed to seek help for agencies and services. The continuance of a punitive system that effectively silences wāhine when their tamariki are removed and denies them the support they need is a social justice and human rights issue. While the

partners of wāhine have a role in their entrapment and the ongoing effects of injury and trauma, the health and social service systems also keep them entrapped in their relationships.

## NEEDING A MANA-ENHANCING SYSTEM

A mana-enhancing system is a much-needed response, yet wāhine encounters with the family violence system for assistance are, for most, mana-diminishing. Services and agencies designed to aid wāhine, such as income support, housing, employment, education and health are often experienced as ‘unsafe.’ Wāhine talked extensively about unsafe services, encountering judgmental and racist attitudes of people working within them; being denied entitlements; and encountering unmet needs.

*E Tū Wāhine*, *E Tū Whānau* captures the contradictions embedded in the pre-colonial lives, colonial histories and contemporary realities of Māori living in Aotearoa, which is reflected in the ambiguities and apparent ‘messiness’ of the lives of many of the wāhine. The experiences of judgmental, racist encounters that wāhine have with people is reflective of the embedded institutional racism that has been reported (Came, 2014; Wilson & Webber, 2014b). Once unravelled, these complexities are far from straight-forward or clear-cut. By critically piecing together the pūrākau of wāhine, we have in some way captured pieces of the complex puzzle they find themselves within. Simply, ambiguities and contradictions contribute to the messiness that results in complexities for wāhine. Understanding the complexities of the lives of wāhine where there is violence within their whānau requires piecing together the composite pieces of their complex puzzle.

Ambiguities exist in several ways – the cultural concept of whānau (Metge, 1995) and the presence of violence; walking in two worlds – te ao Māori and te ao Pākehā; the status of wāhine in Aotearoa; and having access to safe places, spaces and people. Wāhine navigate the two worlds of te ao Māori and te ao Pākehā that at times are at odds with one another daily. It is about understanding that wāhine once had status and mana but are now likely to be living with questionable status, diminished, mana and social marginalisation. Māori live in two worlds, but it is te ao Māori that offers the potential for necessary healing and culturally relevant solutions for our whānau, although they are neither recognised nor funded sufficiently for the demand.

Therefore, navigating such ambiguities must consider what are safe places, spaces and identifying who the safe people are available for wāhine, tāne, tamariki and whānau. Their reality of securing safe places, space and people is often spoiled by encounters with unsafe places, spaces and people. For example, agencies and services that are mana-diminishing, or being reconnected to their marae (generally considered places of safety and security). We found for some wāhine and tāne, marae, generally considered places of safety and security, instances of transgressions of tikanga and abuse took place. Similarly, some participants reported 'respected' people, like kaumātua, abused them yet they continued to hold a position of privilege and respect despite their abuse being well known. Encounters of abuse distorted the belief that all kaumātua were safe people and transgressions regarding the values embedded in Māori tikanga were also vulnerable to misuse and abuse. Therefore, assumptions cannot be made that a site of cultural reconnection such as marae are safe by their mere nature. Likewise, assumptions cannot be made that all kaumātua or other 'respected' people are exemplars of tikanga who uphold the conventions of tradition. The supposition here is that people are moulded by their life experiences and the issue of safety is the responsibility of all adults to uphold and maintain in our places and spaces.

#### Recommendations:

- The Family Violence Sexual Violence Joint Venture Business Unit with Te Rōpū Māori revise policy, procedures and practice across the government non-government agencies to improve the safety and quality of the services and people working within them to promote the access by wāhine to needed support to secure the safety of them and their tamariki.
- The Family Violence Sexual Violence Joint Venture Business Unit with the lead of Te Rōpū Māori explore ways to improve the responsiveness of agencies and services and address the removal of tamariki when wāhine seek help.
- Whānau, hapū and iwi explore the inclusion of promoting safe and respectful relationships by focusing on what mana wāhine and mana tāne relationships look like, as well as positive parenting knowledge and skills as part of their social wellbeing strategies.

## CONTEXT COUNTS – UNDERSTANDING WĀHINE AND TĀNE MĀORI

Pre-colonisation, violence occurring within whānau and hapū was prohibited and addressed harshly at a whānau and hapū level (Kruger et al., 2004; Mikaere, 1994, 2011; Pihama et al., 2019). Violence against wāhine was seen to be an "affront to her mana" (Dhunna et al., 2018), because wāhine held whare tangata status that was essential for the continuance of healthy whakapapa and whānau. With colonisation came:

1. the forceful removal of Māori from their whenua (land) and tūrangawaewae (place to stand in the world);
2. loss of people from disease and warfare;
3. the assimilation policies that actively set about to strip Māori of their language, tikanga and cultural practices that were mechanisms of protection for everyone, especially wāhine and tamariki; disruption to whānau structures and supports; and
4. the change from the complementary gender and power roles wāhine and tāne possessed to systems of patriarchy and hegemony that privileged male dominance and control over wāhine and tamariki (Cram, 2009; Dhunna et al., 2018; Mikaere, 2011).

The colonisation of Māori is considered "an extreme form of violence" (Kruger et al., 2004, p. 11).

Having a comprehensive understanding of the history of Aotearoa, colonisation, its ongoing effects, historical trauma, and its role in the violence evident within contemporary whānau Māori is central to creating the conditions for change (Pihama et al., 2019). This understanding is for not only whānau, hapū and hāpori, but also those working in the area of family and sexual violence. Our history is a central part of the context and for understanding the social positioning of wāhine in contemporary society in Aotearoa. It is also useful for understanding the impacts colonisation has had across generations of whānau and hapū (Mikaere, 2011; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2016).

Comprehending the contextual elements of the lives of wāhine, their unsafe relationships together with other factors contributing to their daily lives and situations is crucial to addressing violence that is occurring within our whānau. Through *E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau* we found that the daily lives of the wāhine are complex and multi-layered, with intersecting forms of oppressions (being women, Māori, often facing poverty, and so forth).

Having an appreciation of the context must inform the comprehensive support that wāhine need. The majority of wāhine in this research managed the tensions and conflicts of asking for help versus the real fear of having their tamariki removed from their care in the best ways they knew how – decisions that were oftentimes based on the context at the time.

The pūrākau of wāhine show how the removal of tamariki occurs with little or no recognition of their priority to protect their tamariki, their strengths, and strategies they undertake to keep them and their tamariki safe was to their detriment. For those wāhine who have had their tamariki removed, this was a major traumatic event that had and continues to have long-term effects that impact the quality of their relationship with their tamariki. We also found that tāne were similarly affected by having their tamariki taken into State care.

The everyday realities and actions of wāhine and tāne are reflective of their social and economic disenfranchisement and living with, oftentimes, long-term social and health challenges. Yet, wāhine demonstrated strength amidst adverse and unsafe environments – they were far from passive recipients of their partners' violence, privileging them over their tamariki. Instead they responded by reading their situations, knowing the triggers for their partners' use of violence, and acting in smart and clever ways to protect their children and prevent or minimise the violence and its effects.

Nevertheless, we became concerned when analysing the pūrākau that most wāhine suffered extensive trauma to their heads and several talked about being strangled and suffocated to the point of losing consciousness. This raises the questions about the possibility of past and current head trauma and the potential for traumatic brain injury (TBI). We were also concerned about the cumulative impact of head trauma and strangulation on their abilities to function, physically and cognitively (such as memory, thinking, executive functioning, depression and concentration) and mental health (depression and PTSD) (Cimino et al., 2019; St Ivany & Schminkey, 2019). Further research is needed in this area, because our purposive, but relatively random, group of wāhine showed head trauma, strangulation and suffocation occurred frequently. We did not anticipate clarifying the nature of this trauma further because the enormity only became evident through the cumulative analysis of their pūrākau.

The retrospective accounts of tāne illustrate the support and healing that they too need. We were surprised by the accounts of abuse of their as tamariki or young people, often sexual in nature, in such a small group of tāne. The source of their deep-seated anger that as adults was vented on their partners went unchecked for years, with them not understanding why they behaved violently. For those tāne growing up without violence in their whānau, this was not a protective factor for them. On the other hand, for those growing up with violence in their whānau the male role models in their lives who displayed a distorted masculinity (compared to a cultural Māori perspective of being tāne) strongly influenced their notions of what was acceptable. We found these tāne had little knowledge, skill and tools in their kete to draw upon – they only had being disrespectful to wāhine (in general) and their fists. Yet, this contrasts with those early accounts of tāne by settlers, missionaries and British crown agents who commented on the nurturing role they had within their hapori (E Tū Whānau, 2018).

The accounts of both wāhine and tāne indicate that tāne use of violence cannot be simply explained by prevailing power and control mechanisms. For the tāne in this study, understanding pre-colonial roles of wāhine and tāne were eye-opening and led them to question why they treated wāhine the way they did. Part of this journey also involved learning the history of Aotearoa and how Māori went from holding wāhine and tamariki in revered positions in Māori society to them being treated so poorly. Tāne use of violence and controlling tactics appeared, in this group anyway, to be related to their sense of losing control in their lives and the loss of their mana. Nonetheless, this needs to be explored further.

#### Recommendations:

- Consider the individual contexts of wāhine and tāne who are living with or who have lived with violence, which extends beyond their presenting 'problem.'
- Develop a guide for collecting contextual information in order to gain a better appreciation of the context and circumstances of wāhine, tāne, tamariki and the whānau.
- Undertake further research with tāne Māori to gain a fuller picture of their needs.

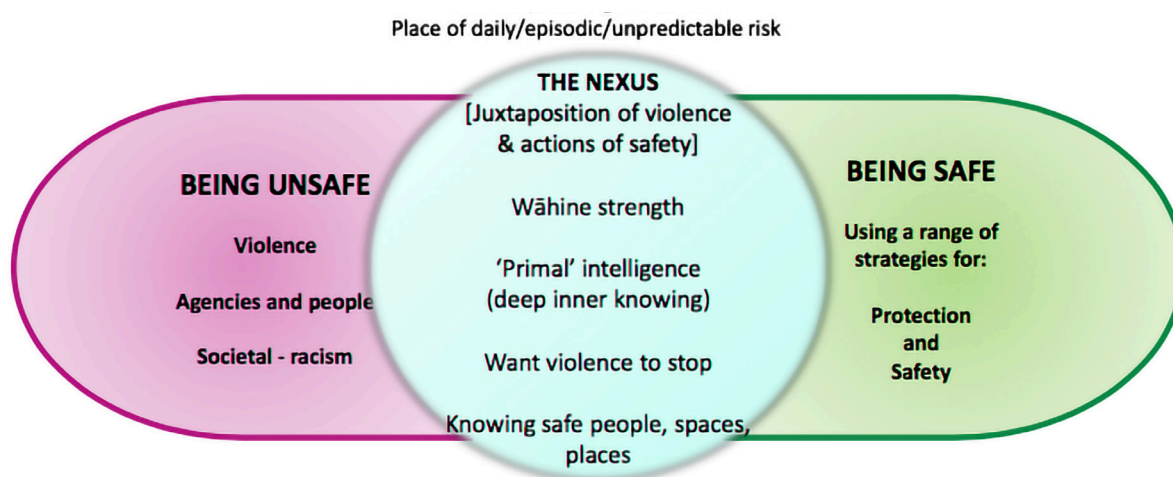


## KEEPING SAFE IS RELATIVE

For wāhine, keeping safe is relative to simultaneously living their lives in an unsafe relationship. Oftentimes their daily lives are spent navigating the constant threats, surveillance, control, isolation and the burden of harm associated with living with a partner who uses violence. The effects of this situation are then compounded by the daily or episodic and the unpredictable risk of their partners' use of violence. This nexus of being safe and unsafe requires wāhine to draw upon their inner strength, primal intelligence, and knowing where the

safe places and spaces are for them and their tamariki (Figure 7.2). They use their strength and call on the range of strategies for the protection and safety of themselves and their tamariki when responding to their partners' violence. Nonetheless, it is not only their partners' use of violence that renders them unsafe. It is also agencies and the people working within them and the negative attitudes held at a societal level about wāhine Māori who are seen to "choose" to live with a "violent partner", and as a consequence, "neglect the wellbeing and safety of their tamariki."

**Figure 7.2 The nexus of being safe and unsafe**



Navigating and negotiating the nexus and the subsequent tensions between being safe and unsafe required wāhine to make contextually bound decisions. Such decision-making reflects responding to what unfolds before them, whereby wāhine respond to the cues emitted by their partner, environment and the context of the situation at the time (Richardson & Wade, 2013). Richardson and Wade maintain that both colonial and intimate partner forms of violence involve physical domination and are attacks on the dignity of those involved. The actions wāhine undertook are reflections of their inner strength and the positive actions they undertake to establish "islands of safety" for themselves and their tamariki (Richardson & Wade, 2013). However, these actions oftentimes go unrecognised. Coates and Wade (2007) and (Wilson, Smith, et al. (2015)) explain

how the language used to document and describe the violence that goes on within Indigenous communities disguises the realities of what is occurring – in these ways language reinforces the deficit discourses, negative stereotypes and victim blaming behaviours of those in agencies, services and society in general. They do it in the following ways by:

1. Hiding the violence;
2. Concealing the users' responsibility for use of the violence;
3. Masking victims' resistance; and
4. Pathologizing and blaming victims (Coates & Wade, 2007; NZ Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2016; Wilson, Smith, et al., 2015)

It is important to note, most wāhine did not want their relationships to end but wanted the violence to stop. However, only a few wāhine were able to work with their partners to achieve a non-violent relationship, others having to leave their partner. However, because help is late in coming for the vast reasons outlined in this report having options of repairing relationships and also ensuring wāhine do not have their tamariki taken (although some wāhine contact with their ex-partners was the basis for the removal of their tamariki), this was not usually an option. Although it should be noted that such options are not necessarily feasible unless tāne were also in the right place to repair their relationships.

#### Recommendations:

- Recognise the nexus of wāhine navigating between being both safe and unsafe to secure 'islands of safety' for themselves and tamariki.
- Further research that explores the implications of the nexus of wāhine navigating being safe and unsafe and the safety and security for tamariki and mokopuna.

## CULTURE AS CURE

Mātauranga and tikanga introduces ideas, beliefs and practices to help shape their thinking about their relationships, and for tāne introduces them to the important status of wāhine. It also provided alternative ways of interacting with partners and tamariki. There was social validation of being Māori by undertaking tikanga properly and completely, a ritual that was both public and private. In learning Māori cultural ways, the places they did this (physical locations and environments), the spaces within which their learning occurred (the āhuatanga or quality or status of the situation) and the people involved (who are mana-enhancing, non-judgmental, genuine, empathetic and compassionate) are crucial to support the healing of wāhine and tāne.

Mātauranga Māori contains ancient but timeless knowledge that provided instructions and lessons and laid down the values and tikanga for living well and harmoniously. These ancient instructions, many of which have survived centuries and remain relevant today, illuminate the foundations for people's interactions to enhance the mana of others, and in the process their whānau. Ancient mātauranga are conveyed in various ways – for instance, in pūrākau tawhito, whakataukī, waiata, karakia, mōteatea, and carvings (Mikahere-Hall, 2017).

The importance of whakapapa and whānau (the connections between our spiritual or metaphysical and our physical worlds) and the cultural values of mana, tapu, tika, pono and aroha, and manaakitanga, for example, provide guidance for our behaviours and interactions with others. These cultural values provided the foundation for tikanga – the protocols that we follow, which all have significance and meaning. Enacting these values upholds the mana of our whakapapa and that of our whānau. Caring for others is important for not only upholding an individual's mana but that of one's own whānau, especially through our ability to engage in manaakitanga. Being unable to engage in manaakitanga (because of a lack of personal, psychological, financial or material resources) causes whakamā is expressed by embarrassment, and shame. Similarly, mana wāhine could not occur without mana tāne – that is upholding the status and authority of both wāhine and tāne and their complementary gender roles.

Our creation stories for instance exemplify the revered place and role of wāhine within whānau, hapū. The pūrākau of the union of Tane and Hine-ahuone instructed us that incest is a kind of death, and the pūrākau of Niwareka and Mataora (Box 7.1) conveyed the serious consequences of wife-beating which is an act of hara (violation of tapu, transgression), not just against the wāhine but her whānau as well.

### PŪRĀKAU: NIWAREKA AND MATAORA

*Niwareka, the daughter of Ue-tonga the high chief of Rarohenga (the underworld) visited the upper-world. There she married Mataora. Mataora's jealousy of his older brother, Tautoru, led to his physically beating Niwareka. In response, Niwareka returned to her people in Rarohenga. Mataora's regret and grief eventually prompted his searching for Niwareka. Arriving at Pou-tere-rangi, he met the guardian of the entrance to Rarohenga who allowed him to enter Rarohenga. Ue-tonga was applying a moko tattoo, and after discussion Mataora too received a permanent moko.*

*Rarohenga was a place of peace, aroha, creativity and a place of respect – it was a world of light without darkness, something he had not known. During his time in Rarohenga and under the guidance of Ue-tonga, Mataora learnt new skills such as weaving and taniko (a form of moko). However, as time passed Mataora wanted to return to Te Aotūroa (the upper world) with Niwareka.*

*Niwareka insisted that this decision resided with her whānau and herself, and so she consulted with her parents and brothers. Ue-tonga did not condone the practice of wife-beating so said Mataora should return along, which shamed him into silence. Niwareka's brother tried to convince Mataora to stay and break with his world of violence, hearing that people in the upper world died from violence like warfare and crime, and where darkness prevailed.*

*Mataora promised to cease using violence and that he would adopt peaceful and loving ways of Rarohenga. In this way he would become a role model for those living in the upper-world of Te Aotūroa and work to stopping wrongful acts, like wife-beating. Mataora returned with Niwareka wearing his moko and a korowai to honour Niwareka's feminine essence, having reformed his thinking and behaviours that led to wife-beating. He was able to do this because he had acquired new knowledge and insights that assisted him to be non-violent.*

### MESSAGES IN THIS PŪRĀKAU:

*This ancient pūrākau of Niwareka and Mataora clearly articulates that wife-beating is unacceptable behaviour. The process of muru (process to redress a transgression) to restore the balance from the hara (violation of tapu, a transgression) like violence against wāhine and involves the restoration of mana. The process of muru is not an individual's or couple's decision alone, but a collective whānau decision. This pūrākau is also about the transformation of the attitudes and behaviour of tāne.*

Prior to colonisation the actions and behaviours of whānau members was governed by mātauranga Māori, and tikanga underpinned by cultural values, such as whakapapa, whanaungatanga, mana, tika, pono, aroha, and manaakitanga. These cultural values and concepts functioned as the pou (posts) metaphorically creating 'unseen fences'<sup>2</sup> that provided whānau and hapū with boundaries for interaction between its members and reinforced a social order (Figure 7.3). These pou dictated and guided how people within whānau and hapū interacted with one another in respectful, compassionate and empathetic ways.

Moreover, te whare tangata established the prominent and equitable status of wāhine within Māori society as bearers of past, present and future generations – wāhine tūpuna had mana as the creators of life, the kaitiaki of whānau wellbeing, and play a crucial role in the continuity of whakapapa (Mikaere, 2003). Because of their whare tangata status, assault on wāhine such as rape was prohibited because of the intrinsic tapu of women. In addition to bearing the next generation, wāhine were also leaders in their own right, keepers of knowledge and kaitiaki (guardians) of whānau (Mikaere,

2003). As the pūrākau of Niwareka and Mataora tells us, transgressions against wāhine or her tamariki such as violence were addressed by the whānau of both parties through a process of utu and muru to restore balance. In other words, rectifying any wrongdoings was a collective whānau and hapū (of both victim and offender) endeavour not left up to the individual to right the wrong.

The unseen fences created by cultural values and tikanga that regulated social and interpersonal behaviours within whānau and hapū were replaced by structures generated from colonialism, Christianity, capitalism and Victorian social norms. These colonial structures eroded the gender and power balance that existed between wāhine and tāne along with the loss of land, language and the beliefs, values and practices that kept everyone safe. Aided by assimilation policies and the introduction of Christian and British Victorian social norms, men's privileged and dominant status enabled wāhine and tamariki to become their property – something that was adopted by tāne.

**Figure 7.3. 'Unseen fences' – the protective 'pou' (posts) of tikanga**



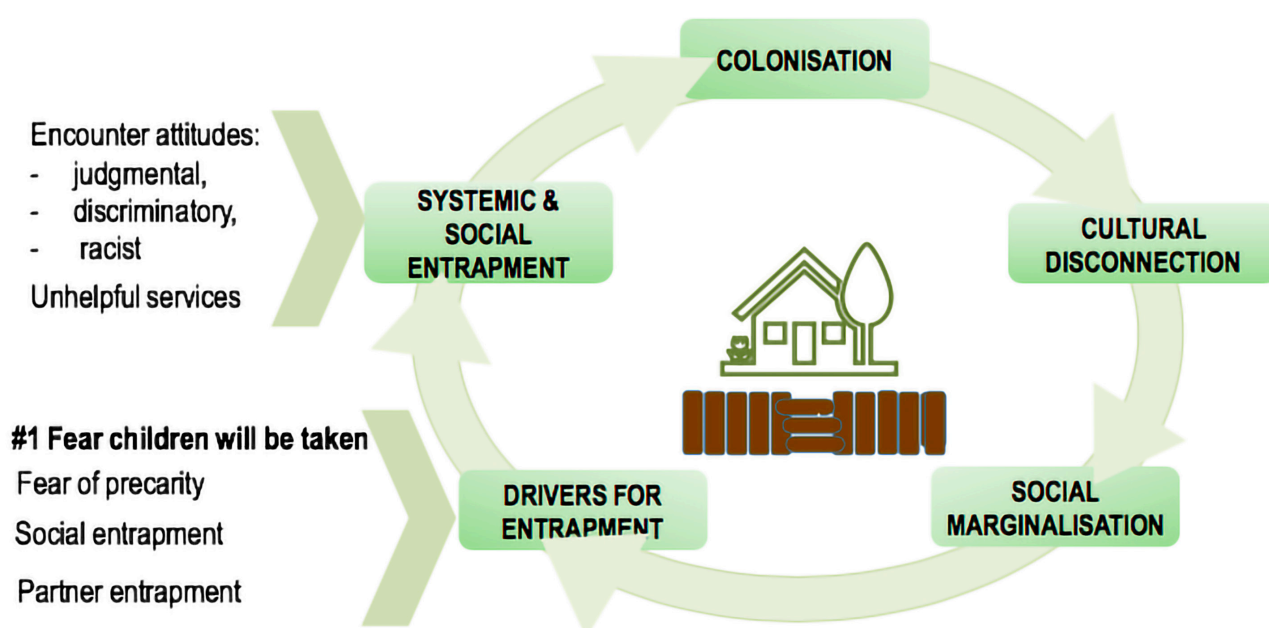
<sup>2</sup> 'Unseen fences' is a metaphorical explanation of social control and the subsequent replacement of the cultural values and tikanga that kept everyone safe. These were replaced with colonisation by the seen fences that ironically kept everything behind them hidden, enabling violence against women and children.



Cultural dislocation and disconnection, disruption of gender and power balance between wāhine and tāne, and social and economic disenfranchisement worked to erode the efficacy of the unseen fences. Wāhine subsequently lost their rightful status in society and became socially marginalized. Instead, unseen fences were replaced by physical fences around people's

homes. These fences together with the locked doors of homes enabled violence against wāhine and tamariki to occur and continue without any accountability and with whānau being unaware, at times, of what was happening. Contemporary 'unseen fences' for whānau and wāhine became sites of entrapment (Figure 7.4).

**Figure 7.4. Contemporary 'unseen fences' as sites of entrapment for wāhine Māori**



Through the course of *E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau*, it became obvious that the majority of wāhine and tāne had become culturally disconnected. As a consequence, sense of identity as Māori were eroded. A prominent turning point in their pūrākau was the strengthening of their cultural identity as Māori, making them feel valued and proud over time, and the (re)learning or returning to cultural values and practices. This became powerful in (a) their journey toward being non-violent, and (b) learning new and mana-enhancing ways of living in the world. Indeed, for tāne this was more powerful than attending (often mandated) stopping violence programmes. They felt most supported to undertake such journeys within kaupapa Māori service providers who we observed took a whole of whānau approach and functioned on little funding.

While most wāhine displayed aspects of being Māori (for instance they demonstrated aroha, manaakitanga, and collective obligations to others) they all had somewhat tenuous connections to Māori cultural practices, values and te reo me ōna tikanga. Not having te reo can make it difficult to participate and access support from whānau Māori and services. The wāhine were diverse in background and experiences, with most being disconnected from their cultural roots. Whether they are connected or not, automatically connecting them to a marae or kaumātua is not necessarily the right thing to do, for reasons already discussed. Nevertheless, we found that for both wāhine and tāne strengthening their cultural identity as Māori and (re)connecting with cultural values, mātauranga, tikanga and te ao Māori

was a crucial component in their healing. However, this needed to be undertaken with consideration of determining safe places, spaces and people in doing this.

Both wāhine and tāne claimed that counselling alone not an effective modality for addressing the trauma and violence they were living with. Instead, they wanted to talk to people who knew and had lived their realities and who had come out the other side. This speaks to the importance of looking at relevant, meaningful and long-term healing pathways, which sit outside conventional social and health settings. Furthermore, the notion of 'culture as cure' was highlighted as a crucial component for both wāhine and tāne as part of their healing journeys. The protective nature of culture within the context of colonisation and increased cultural efficacy is seen to have a positive impact of mental health outcomes and reducing psychological distress (Muriwai, Houkamau, & Sibley, 2015).

We found that both wāhine and tāne connecting with Māori culture, values and practices, and learning about the significance of mana wāhine–mana tāne was instrumental in their healing journey and stopping the violence in their relationships. This did not occur overnight, but happened over a long-term journey with bumps and barriers to be negotiated along the way. Māori understand the value of culturally based solutions in addressing violence within our whānau, however, promoting the availability and accessibility of providers offering such support is important. Culturally relevant solutions (that is, by Māori, for Māori, with Māori solutions) are marginalised despite repeated articulation of our pursuit for wellbeing and mana-enhancing encounters. Māori have demonstrated amongst Māori communities the potential for necessary and culturally relevant solutions, although they are neither recognised nor funded sufficiently for the demand. Importantly, the solutions lie within Māori communities.

*E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau* demonstrates the strength and value of culture and restoring the cultural balance within whānau. We suggest that this could also be utilised as a preventive approach with our whānau and thereby strengthen our communities, especially young and new parents. Resources such as those produced by Pihama, Greensill, Campbell, Te Nana, and Lee (2015) shows whānau how whakataukī can be used to assist their parenting. From the pūrākau of both wāhine and tāne, the role of culture in their healing and restoration journeys cannot be underestimated.

#### Recommendations:

- Recognise that the solutions for transforming whānau where violence exists lies in mātauranga and within Māori communities, not in Western-based interventions. The revitalisation of Māori cultural values and tikanga and the restoration of mana within our whānau is crucial.
- Include the strengthening identity as Māori and connecting them to cultural values, tikanga and te ao Māori as an essential component in healing and enhancing the mana of wāhine, tāne and tamariki and the whole whānau – this role belongs with kaupapa Māori family violence service providers.
- Prevention strategies for whānau should adopt a 'culture as cure' approach that enhances the mana of individuals and the whānau, strengthens identity and introduces cultural values and tikanga that are protective.

## HURIHURI O WHAKAARO ME TE MAHI: TRANSFORMING THINKING AND DOING

*E Tū Wāhine, E Tū Whānau* has provided the opportunity to gain critical and in-depth insights into how family violence in Aotearoa, specifically as it applies to whānau Māori from wāhine and, to a lesser degree, tāne perspectives. It goes without saying that the status quo has gone on for too long and cannot be allowed to continue.

As wāhine endured the violence within their relationships, they journey through several phases: Te Kore to Te Po to Te Ao Marama, highlighting that within the realm of Te Kore each wāhine has potential. They appear to arrive at a point where they have accumulated knowledge and wisdom that they can call upon to make decisions. For instance, for some wāhine they have resided in Te Po, the phase of varying shades of darkness, moving from a cold dark place that occurs in the presence of severe violence that leaves them fearful for the lives of themselves and their tamariki.

But regardless of this dark place some wāhine found within themselves their potential, which always existed within them. The potential wāhine possess does not just happen, instead it requires all the necessary components to come together with a knowing at a deep-seated ngākau level. This knowing is not simply the knowledge that wāhine possess that sits at the roro (brain) or cognitive level, but rather that deep inner knowing that sits in our ngākau. Nevertheless, emerging from Te Po into Te Ao Marama is not a smooth or straight forward path, but rather a long-term journey that is shorter for some wāhine than others.

Continuing to apportion fault onto wāhine Māori who find themselves in a relationship with a violent partner reflects societal value placed on them. Blaming wāhine for their partner's behaviour, sometimes whānau beliefs and attitudes, the poor responsiveness of the system that should be helping them, and societal attitudes generally reinforces the notion that wāhine are the authors of their own fate. Such responsiveness, at best is unhelpful and at worst puts them and their tamariki at further risk of harm and sadly for some death.

Despite their social and systemic marginalisation, wāhine keep themselves and their tamariki safe in the best ways they can. In the process, we found they engaged a number of strategies aimed at saving their sense of self that can manifest in various behaviours, such as suffering in silence, denial of what is happening to them, coping the best they can and reflecting on how they can manage. They are not passive recipients of violence – they are intelligent, resourceful wāhine who are highly motivated to keep their tamariki safe. Using the theory of change presented in this report, the key findings therefore can assist in transforming thinking and doing as it applies to wāhine Māori living with violence in their whānau (Figure 7.5).

### TE KORE: CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE

For *Te Kore: Creating the conditions for change* to occur, we must consider the contexts for each wāhine. To ignore their individual contexts risks repeating the same responses when wāhine seek assistance, especially in times of crisis. Moreover, the places, the spaces and the people within the family violence system need to be safe – it is not acceptable for wāhine to fear approaching services for assistance because their tamariki will be

taken and they will be treated in judgmental and racist ways, only to leave with little or no help and potentially their children removed from their care. We have found that wāhine continue to return to relationships with a partner who uses violence because they have few or no options available to them so they could ensure the safety of themselves and their tamariki while simultaneously ensuring the provisions and necessities of life are available to them. For instance, leaving but doing so without money or housing security also compromises the safety of their tamariki with unknown people in unfamiliar environments.

### TE PO: CHANGING CONVERSATIONS AND WHAT WE KNOW

There is a real need to change the nature of the conversations and what we think we know about wāhine living with violence within their whānau. The current deficit-based conversations are informed by negative stereotypes, unvalidated assumptions, judgments and racism. These types of conversations add to the marginalisation of wāhine, and sadly at times when they need to seek outside assistance, contributed to their reticence to seek help. It was not unusual for wāhine to be denied in some form help when they tried to secure it.

Furthermore, keeping safe is relative – for wāhine their reality is one whereby they become entrapped by not only their partners but also by their fears (grounded in reality) and the very family violence (health and social services included) system that should be there to help them. There is an urgent need to change the conversations and the level of acceptability of conversations not based on verified facts within agencies and services. We have found they are harmful and contribute further to the precarious position of wāhine living with violence. Moreover, we found all wāhine prioritised the protection of their tamariki and acted to manage safety the best way that they could dependent upon the context of the situation at the time. They are not passive recipients of violence who prioritise their partner over their tamariki.

Figure 7.5. Hurihuri o Whakaaro me te Mahi: Transforming thinking and doing



## TE AO MARAMA: CREATING DIFFERENT PATHWAYS

New ‘restoration’ narratives are needed when it comes to whānau Māori, because the current narratives are doing little to curb the violence and the harm arising from the violence occurring within our whānau. In creating new restoration narratives, these need to be underpinned by the following:

- Understanding of the impacts of colonisation and its ongoing effects including precarity and marginalization on whānau, and more specifically on wāhine and tāne Māori;
- Interventions need to be relevant, meaningful and practical – Western-based interventions are often based on individualism and ignore the importance of whakapapa and whānau;
- ‘Culture as cure’ that focuses on strengthening Indigenous Māori identities and (re)connecting to cultural values, beliefs, pūrākāu (narratives) and tikanga;
- Draw on the mātauranga within our ancient stories and sources of cultural knowledge that contain important life messages still relevant today;
- Privilege the importance of whakapapa (an important source of identity that includes wāhine, tāne, tamariki and whānau together), whanaungatanga (connections), aroha (compassion and empathy, love), and whānau (extended family networks);
- Recognise the power of Indigenous Māori interventions and Māori faces;
- Reflect the complexity of violence within Māori whānau, and how asking for help is oftentimes fraught with risk for wāhine;



- Address the role of agencies, services and those working within the system play in the systemic entrapment of wāhine; and
- The importance of enhancing mana, and having compassion and empathy when working with wāhine, tāne and tamariki.

Creating new pathways must include ‘culture as cure’ and be freely available and accessible to aid those wāhine, tāne, tamariki and whānau to heal. We strongly recommend that such mana-enhancing ‘interventions’ informed by mātauranga Māori and kaupapa Māori research should be the starting point, and any other interventions included as required.

Furthermore, structural and systemic changes are urgently required so that agencies meet the needs of wāhine, tamariki, tāne and whānau by being compliant with responsibilities and obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Such responsibilities of government and non-government agencies and services providers must uphold tino rangatiratanga and mana motuhake (self-determination, autonomy), ōritetanga (equity), active protection, and partnership that includes co-design in policy, practice standards and services (Waitangi Tribunal, 2019). The Hauora WAI 2575 Health Services and Outcomes Kaupapa Inquiry found primary health providers were woefully lacking in upholding the ‘principles’ Treaty of Waitangi, which Waitangi Tribunal claimed needed revising (Waitangi Tribunal, 2019). We suggest a similar outcome is likely with family violence services, which are not necessarily meeting the needs to wāhine, tāne, tamariki and whānau. New (and not so new for Kaupapa Māori family violence services) services must be properly funded and resourced so that Māori are the key drivers of change that restores the mana and ora (wellbeing) of whānau.

The current system is not equipped to provide such an approach, however, the pūrākau of wāhine and tāne indicate that culture was a powerful point of change for them to live without violence. Furthermore, culture has an important role to play in the prevention of violence from occurring within our whānau, primarily because it promotes mana wāhine, mana tāne, mana tamariki and mana whānau – something that has been lost because of colonisation, historical trauma, assimilation, and social marginalisation and disenfranchisement.

## CONCLUSION

The current narratives and discourses that prevail within Aotearoa are at best unhelpful and at worst harmful – they do little to uplift the mana of wāhine, tamariki, tāne and their whānau. This is evident in the deaths of wāhine and tamariki, the pūrākau of wāhine and tāne Māori, and the actions of people and services that contribute to the persistence of violence occurring within our whānau. For wāhine Māori to be supported better and to live violence-free, we need new ways of conceptualising how they are affected by violence that is grounded within te ao Māori.

Furthermore, we suggest that places and spaces, such as government and non-government agencies, to be safe they require significant over-hauling to be more responsive to the needs of wāhine Māori and importantly so they can have sufficient trust and reliance on them for support in times of necessity. Systems are driven by people – challenging conversations need to be had because the quality of interactions with wāhine Māori can be changed and make a big difference.

*Maia te pounamu pīata ana*

*Polish the gem until brilliance shines though*

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